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SWEDISH MASTERPIECES

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MODERN SWEDISH MASTERPIECES

SHORT STORIES SELECTED AND TRANSLATED

BY

CHARLES WHARTON STORK

TRANSLATOR OF "ANTHOLOGY OF SWEDISH LYRICS," "SELECTED POEMS BY GUSTAF FRÖDING," ETC.

Editor of *Contemporary Verse*

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TO
THORSTEN LAURIN
FRIEND OF ARTISTS
PATRON OF THE ARTS

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THE special thanks of the translator are due to the American-Scandinavian Foundation of New York City for permission to include the stories by Verner von Heidenstam from the two volumes of *The Charles Men,* as well as for stories by Söderberg and Siwertz which appeared in the *American Scandinavian Review.*

Three stories by Söderberg were published in *Hearst's Magazine,* and others in *The Freeman, The Bookman, World Fiction* and *The Wave.* Hallström's "Out of the Dark" appeared in *The Double Dealer.* We gladly acknowledge our debt to the proprietors of these magazines for allowing us to reprint from their pages.

Our chief debt is, however, to the original authors and to A. Bonnier and Co., Stockholm, for the right to translate these specimens of Swedish genius into another language.

PREFACE

It is curious that, despite the rapid growth of interest in Scandinavian literature through the English-speaking world, there has been up to now no book to represent one of the most brilliant fields of achievement, the Swedish short story. The work of Selma Lagerlof is well known and a volume of Per Hallström has appeared recently, but no attempt has been made to represent a group of the leading masters. The present collection, whatever its failings, will at least indicate the power and variety of the Scandinavian genius in a new and important phase of its expression.

The four authors here included are all living and active, from which it may be rightly inferred that the Swedish short story is of recent development. Verner von Heidenstam, born in 1859, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1916, has an international reputation but is not as yet widely known in America. The stories here selected are from his historical novel, *The Charles Men,* set in the time of Charles XII; for though the book has a clear unity, the separate chapters can be understood perfectly by themselves. Per

Hallström, somewhat younger, is ranked even higher by Swedish critics as a master of short stories. The volume of translations just published omits, quite unaccountably, the two specimens here given which belong to his very best style. Hjalmar Söderberg, also a writer in his fifties, has been called the Anatole France of Sweden. Unknown in America up to now, his stories have won marked favor on their appearance in magazines. Sigfrid Siwertz, but slightly over forty, is the most promising of the younger generation. Less outstanding than the others, he has nevertheless a fine balance and much grace of detail. His chief novel, under the title *Downstream,* has just appeared in translation.

As to the varying characteristics of these stories it seems best to leave everyone to form his own opinions. It is not likely that writers of such strong individuality will appeal equally to the general public. Such authors, however, need no apology. This volume is, unless the translator has failed badly, a challenge to American literary taste. It is not the book that is on trial but the reader.

C. W. S.

CONTENTS

HJALMAR SÖDERBERG

	PAGE
The Chimney-Sweeper's Wife	3
Bloom	14
The Fur Coat	28
The Blue Anchor	34
The Kiss	44
The Dream of Eternity	48
The Drizzle	54
The Drawing in India Ink	58
The Wages of Sin	61
Communion	66
The Clown	71
Signy	76
A Masterless Dog	80

SIGFRID SIWERTZ

The Lady in White	87
Leonard and the Fisherman	104

VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM

When the Bells Ring	125
The Fortified House	145
The Queen of the Marauders	168
Captured	190

PER HALLSTRÖM

The Falcon	221
Out of the Dark	237

STORIES BY
HJALMAR SÖDERBERG

THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER'S WIFE

THIS is a grim and sad story. I heard it told more than once in my childhood, and it made me wonder and shudder.

In a side street stands an old middle-class house with a smooth gray façade. Through a large round-arched door without any decorations—there is, to be sure, a date, and perhaps too a couple of garlands with fruit—one comes upon a narrow courtyard paved with cobblestones, and a dark, stone-paved fountain like so many of its kind, where the sun never strikes the path. An old linden with pollarded branches, blackened bark, and leafage thinned with age stands in one corner; it is as old as the house, older indeed, and is always a favorite resort for the children and cats of the courtyard.

This was of old the yard of Wetzmann, the master chimney-sweep.

Sweeper Wetzmann must have been a very good-natured old fellow. He had had success in life and had got together quite a large property. He was kind to the poor, harsh to his prentices—for such was the custom; so perhaps it needed to

be, too—and drank toddy in the tavern every evening, for he had a poor life at home.

His wife was likewise harsh to the prentices, but she was not kind to the poor or to anyone else either. She had worked as maid-servant in sweeper Wetzmann's house before she became his second wife. At that time Envy and Lust were the two of the seven deadly sins which were nearest her nature; now it was rather Wrath and Pride.

She was large and strongly built and in her earlier days must have been handsome.

The son Frederick was slim and pale. He was born of the first marriage, and it was said that he resembled his mother. He had a good head and a cheerful disposition, and was studying to be a minister. He had just become a student when he fell into a long and severe illness which held him to his bed a whole winter.

In a wing of the court lived a charwoman with her daughter Magda. Was her name really Magda? I do not know, but I always called her so to myself when as a child I heard the older people tell of her on a winter evening in the twilight; and I pictured to myself a pale, shy little child's face, flooded about with an abundance of bright hair, and with a very red mouth. She was fifteen and had just been confirmed. Perhaps it was that "being confirmed" which made me repre-

sent her to myself as serious and quiet, like the young girls I used to see in church on Sunday, and which caused me to think of her as clad in a long shiny black dress.

In the spring, when the student began to convalesce, the charwoman's daughter came by his desire to sit at his bedside a while in the afternoon and read aloud.

Mrs. Wetzmann did not approve of this. She was afraid a liking might grow up between them. Her stepson, for all she cared, might fall in love with whomsoever he wished and might betroth himself, too—that did not concern her; but at least it must not be with a charwoman's daughter! She kept a mistrustful eye on Magda, but had to put up with the arrangement. An invalid should of course be diverted in some way or other; and the doctor had forbidden him to read in bed, because he had weak eyes and was not to overstrain himself.

So the girl sat by his bedside and read aloud both religious and secular books, and the student lay there pale and weak, listening to her voice and looking at her, too, in which he found pleasure.

Such a red mouth she had!

They were nearly of the same age—he was not over seventeen or eighteen—and they had often played together as children. Soon enough they grew confidential.

As often as possible Mrs. Wetzmann found some excuse to go into the sick-room to see how things were getting on there. The two young folks ought to have noticed this and been on their guard; but then one does not always do as one ought. One day, when she noiselessly and cautiously opened the door, matters were in the following state: Magda had left her chair, which had been set at some distance from the bed, and now stood leaning over the head-board with her arms around the young man's neck. He in turn had raised himself half up with his elbows propped on the pillow and was caressing her hair with a thin white hand, while they kissed each other fervently. From time to time, also, they whispered certain broken words without meaning.

The sweeper's wife grew dark red. Notwithstanding, she could not keep from smiling inwardly: hadn't everything turned out exactly as she knew it would! But now there was going to be an end to it. Wrath and Pride rose up within her, till they swelled and glowed from her cheeks and eyes, which sent out sparks; and who knows —while she stood there silent and unseen, regarding the two young people, who had neither eyes nor ears for anything but each other—who knows if Envy and Lust, too, did not covertly slink forth from their retreat and play each on its own hidden string within her soul?

She did not reflect long, but stepped hastily forward to the bed, seized the girl's slender wrist in an iron grasp, gave her a disgraceful epithet, and flung her out of the door with a stream of the foulest abuse. Afterwards, in the interested presence of the servants and prentices, she swore a solemn and luscious oath that if the young girl ever again dared to set foot within her threshold, she should get her skin full of so many blows that she would not be able to stir a fin for fourteen days.

There was no one who doubted that she meant to keep her word.

The invalid made no reproaches to his step-mother. Every time she went through the room he turned his face to the wall; he did not wish to see or speak to her after her performance with Magda. But one day he confided to his father in private that he could not live unless Magda might be his bride. The old chimney-sweeper was surprised and vexed, but dared not immediately set up any serious opposition: his son was the one person he cared for and who showed him any tenderness in return, and he could not endure the thought of losing him.

He put the matter aside for future action and gave his wife a share in his anxiety.

How can I describe what occurred next? It

sounds like an evil dream or a story made to frighten children when they are naughty, and yet it is true.

It is supposed to have been on a Sunday evening in May that it happened.

The courtyard is still, the street is still. Maybe someone hums a song through a kitchen window, or some children play down in the alley. . . . The invalid is alone in his room. He is counting the quarter-hours and the minutes. It is spring outside now. Soon it will be summer. Shall he never get up from his bed, never again hear the woods murmur and rustle, never as before be able to measure the day in periods of activity and periods of rest? And Magda. . . . If only he did not always see before him her face with the wild alarm in her look that came there when his stepmother seized her by the wrist! She had not needed to be afraid. The wicked woman would not have dared to do her any serious harm, for she knew that he had chosen her for his bride.

So he lies there dreaming, now awake, now half-awake, while he lets his pupils suck in the light of the sunbeam on the white door. When he shuts his eyes, there swims out an archipelago of poisonously green islands surrounded by an inky black sea. And as he dozes, the green passes over into blue, the black brightens to bluish red

with ragged dark edges, and at last everything grows black together. . . .

He feels a light hand stroking his forehead, and he starts up in bed.

It is Magda. Magda stands before him, small and slender, with a smiling red mouth, and lays a bunch of spring flowers in front of him on the cover. Anemones and almond blossoms and violets.

Is it true, is it really she?

"How did you dare?" he whispers.

"Your stepmother is away," she answers. "I saw her go just now, dressed to go out. I heard she was to go to South Stockholm, and it will surely be long before she comes home. So then I slipped up the stairs and in to you."

She stays a long while with him, telling of the woods where she has walked alone and listened to the birds and picked spring flowers for him whom she loves. And they kiss each other as often as possible and caress like two children, and both are happy, while the hours run and the sunbeam on the floor becomes burning gold and then red, then pales and fades away.

"Perhaps you ought to go," says Frederick. "She may soon be home. What should I do if she wanted to beat you, I who am lying here sick and weak, who grow dizzy if I get up out of bed. Perhaps you ought to go."

"I'm not afraid," says Magda.

For she wants to show unmistakably that she loves him and that she will gladly suffer for her love's sake.

Only when twilight comes does she kiss him for the last time and steal out of the house. She stops a minute in the courtyard and looks up at the window of the room where he is lying with her almond blossoms and violets on the bedcover. When she turns to the little room in the wing of the court, she stands face to face with Mrs. Wetzmann, and she utters a little scream.

There is no living human being in the courtyard, none but these two. Round about stand the walls, staring at them in the darkness with empty, black windows, and the old linden trembles in its corner.

"You've been up there!" says the sweeper's wife.

As a child I always believed that she smiled when she said this, and that her teeth shone as white in the darkness as those of her husband's prentices.

"Yes, I have been with him," Magda may perhaps have answered, defiant and erect even in her chalk-pale terror.

What happened then? No one really knows, but probably there was a desperate pursuit round the courtyard. At the foot of the old linden the

girl tripped and fell. She dared not call for help, for fear the invalid might hear; and besides, who would have helped her? Her mother was away at work. The infuriated woman was above her—she had meanwhile got hold of a weapon, a broomstick or something of the sort,—and blow followed blow. A couple of half-strangled screams from a throat constricted by the dread of death, and then nothing more.

A couple of prentices who had just come home stood down in the dark doorway and looked on; they did not move a finger to help the girl. Perhaps they did not dare; perhaps, too, they were led by a faint hope of seeing their mistress carried off in a police wagon some day.

When Mrs. Wetzmann went into the house after exercising her right of mastery—for she felt by instinct that she naturally had proprietary right to all over whom she could and would exercise it—she stumbled against something soft in the stairway. It was Frederick. He had heard the faint screams, had sprung from bed and gone out, and had fallen on the stairs.

Magda lived three days; she then died and was buried.

Sweeper Wetzmann paid a sum of money to the charwoman, her mother, and there were no legal proceedings on the matter. Nevertheless the old man took it hard. He went no more to

the tavern to drink toddy, but generally sat at home in a leather-covered chair and spelled in an old Bible. He fell into a decline, grew silent and peculiar, and it was not a year before he too was dead and laid in earth.

The son Frederick grew slowly better; but he never passed his examination as minister, for both his grasp of intellect and his memory had become weakened. He was often seen going with flowers to Magda's grave; he walked leaning forward and very rapidly, indeed he almost ran, as if he had many important errands to attend to, and he mostly had a couple of books under his arm. To the end he remained wholly weak-minded.

And the sweeper's wife? She seems to have had a strong nature. There are people who are not exactly conscienceless, but who never of their own accord hit upon the idea that they have done anything wrong. It may happen that a fellow with bright buttons on his coat may clap them on the shoulder and request them to come along with him; then their conscience awakens. But no one came to Mrs. Wetzmann. She sent her stepson to an asylum when he became too troublesome at home, she mourned her husband, as was proper and customary, and then she married again. When she drove to church on the bridal day, she wore a jacket of lilac-colored silk with gold braid and was "fixed up fit to kill"—so said

my grandmother, who was sitting at her window in the house opposite and saw the whole display while she was turning a leaf in her book of sermons.

BLOOM

ON a brilliant August morning at eight o'clock precisely the gates of the establishment of Langholm were opened for three boarders of the establishment, who had come there for various causes and sojourned for various periods. These periods were exactly suited to the grade and kind of their differences with the law-abiding community as proved by their conduct. They did not know each other, and having no feeling of brotherhood through their common misfortune, they said to one another neither good-morning nor good-bye.

The man who came out first was a thick-set fellow with a beast-like forehead and heavy wrists. One dark evening he had fallen upon an old workman whom he did not like, knocked out some of his teeth, and kicked him in the chest so that he coughed blood for several days. He had been given a month for assault and battery, which did him little harm, and he betook himself hastily to the nearest tavern.

Next came a man who had swindled an impersonal entity known as a bank of a fairly large

sum of money. The three months he had spent indoors had not overly bleached his fresh brandy complexion. He had a well-fitting summer suit of dark blue with narrow white edgings; on his feet he wore new yellow shoes, and in his hand he held an elegant little satchel of the same color as the shoes, so that he most nearly resembled a traveling salesman who comes whistling softly out of a hotel. He did not, however, whistle, but mounted into a cab with a lowered hood, under which a black-clad woman with pale and anxious features awaited him. He then tossed an address to the coachman, and vanished in a cloud of dust.

Last came the former tailor's apprentice Bloom, Oscar Valdemar Napoleon. His complexion inclined more to gray, for he had had to atone with a nine months' sentence for the theft of a jacket hung out for show—this being, to be sure, his second trip to the establishment. He had in his right breast pocket, besides his birth certificate with its less flattering annotations, the sum of eighty crowns inserted in a blue envelope, together with a certificate of good conduct at Langholm from the prison director.

That was not much to represent nine months' work, but he had also had his board and lodging meanwhile. For him it was in any case a considerable sum, and it had been besides a lever for many future plans, most of which rested on

clear improbabilities, for many dreams of a new life, for happiness and prosperity and general respect. This had been especially the case during those last weeks when, in consideration of his rapidly approaching freedom, he had been spared the humiliation of being shaved, for he had felt his manly self-esteem sprout afresh and grow in rivalry with the bristles on his upper lip and chin. But now, when he was actually free, when he felt the light, cool breeze of the summer morning fan about his temples and heard it rustling in the big trees, all of these plans were pushed somewhat into the background as if of themselves, of course only until a later time, only for a few hours or perhaps a day, and a single great emotion of happiness rose up in him and swept him along as though in a vertigo. Furthermore he was very hungry, because he had hardly touched his Langholm fare on that last morning, and he thought with yearning and satisfaction of a little restaurant on Brenchurch Street which he knew from of old, and of a great beefsteak with onions and one or maybe two bottles of beer—only think of it, beer!

On the Langholm Bridge stood a guard off duty, fishing for roach with small bits of saffron bread. Bloom stood with his arms on the railing and watched: it amused him to pretend that he was not in a hurry. Down there in the deep

green of the quiet water, in the shadow under the bridge, big red-eyed roach swam back and forth around the bait, pointing at it a while, turning around in hesitation and coming back again; now and then came a rudd or two with red fins and yellow back, beautiful fish, but tasting a little of clay, and once in a while came a glint from the broad silver side of a bream. On both sides of the narrow Langholm Bay large bending willows dipped their gray-green leaves into the water, and the reeds waved gently in the morning wind. In the background far away, the churches and towers of Stockholm stood in the blue sun-haze as if cut with a fine needle.

"Yes," remarked Bloom to the guard, "now one can begin to live again."

"Yes, good luck to you, Bloom!" answered the guard without taking his eyes from the float, which just then took a dip under the water. "That was a bite, but the fish only took the bread and left the hook to the landlord."

A steam sloop came sputtering up under the bridge on its way to the city and lay to at the nearest landing. For a moment Bloom was tempted to go with it, but came back directly to his first idea: the restaurant on Brenchurch Street, beefsteak, onions and beer, so he said good-bye to the guard and went ahead on the Langholm Road. He felt himself from of old

most at home in the section of South Stockholm between Skinnarviksberg, Lilyholm Bridge and Langholm.

When Bloom emerged, full-fed and contented, from his restaurant, his first impulse was to buy a new black felt hat, for the old one inclined too much to yellow-brown, and he had heard sometime or other that the hat makes the gentleman. After that he went to the nearest barber shop on Horn Street and had them remove the stubble from his chin, together with part of that on his cheeks; retaining, however—besides his mustaches, of course—a couple of small mutton-chop whiskers next the ears. After that he went slantwise across the street to a general outfitter's, whence he came out attired in a clean white collar, a blue-edged dickey, and a brilliant light-blue necktie. A few steps further up the street he stopped before a photographer's show-case and looked at himself in the glass. He was greatly moved at the transformation he had undergone. A ribbon-like strip of paper was picturesquely wound among portraits of serving-maids, dressmakers, Salvation Army soldiers, recruits, and a parson with a parson's collar; and when he read on this that he could have half-a-dozen card-sized pictures made for two and a half crowns, he felt an irresistible temptation to

go up and be photographed. It was partly that the day was significant for him, so that the likeness he had taken now would be a memento for the rest of his life; partly, too, that he had a dark foreboding, which he tried to put by, that it might be long before he would again be in a condition equally worthy to be immortalized in a picture. Furthermore, he had had himself photographed at various times previously, and he remembered with satisfaction the agreeable feeling he had experienced in seeing his ego in an, as it were, glorified aspect, without spots on his coat or damaging inequalities in his complexion, handsomely shaved and with a dignified and engaging expression. He went up to the photographer, combed his hair solicitously before a mirror, and sat down motionless before the camera with his hands on his knees.

"Will it be good?" he asked, when the sitting was over.

"The gentleman will look like a bank director," answered the photographer after he had glanced at the plate.

When he stood on the street again, he became conscious of his good intentions calling more strongly and clearly than before. He ought to go down to the city, look up a couple of God-fearing and kindly people to whom the prison director and the pastor had given him directions,

get work, and procure himself a cheap lodging. But it was still early in the day, the clock-maker's time-piece over there on the corner did not yet point quite to ten, the sun shone heart-warmingly in the blue heavens, and the air was mild and still. He could give himself a little time, he could go a piece toward Lilyholm out in the woods.

Yes, the woods—he had thought of them many times while he sat caged off there behind the grating.

He had grown up in a village on a wooded slope half a mile south of Stockholm. After he had been confirmed, he had been set as prentice to a pious little tailor in South Stockholm. The tailor was a Baptist; Bloom also became a Baptist and submitted to total immersion. But when he went to another tailor, who belonged to the national church and constantly misused the name of the Devil, his new faith gradually waned. He made new acquaintances and became the betrothed of a middle-aged serving-maid who had a bank-book and gave him money. In that way he grew accustomed to amusements, not great, but nevertheless more than are good for poor folks. On fine summer evenings he often sat in Mosebacke's café or on the river terrace drinking punch, sometimes with his intended, but sometimes with a little dark-haired dressmaker, whom he had got to know at Tekla's one afternoon

when she had given a tea in the maid's room. She was called Edith; she had thick dark hair and very red lips. She went for long periods without work, but always knew how to provide for herself notwithstanding. Bloom often wished that Tekla's faithful love for him, together with her bank-book, might by some magic means be transferred to Edith. But Edith's heart was inconstant and never to be relied upon, and the bank-book still remained Tekla's. So, as the case was, he at least got a little enjoyment from the money of the one and the red lips of the other.

But then came the end. The tailor with whom he worked went bankrupt, and he was out of work. Tekla promised to help him and took out money from the bank; he was to have the loan of thirty crowns till he found work. On the evening when he was to get the money she forced him to stay longer than he cared to, and when at last he was to go and only waited for the money, the crash came. She was all the more angry because she had to speak low for fear of waking the family. Edith had been up in her room that afternoon, they had fallen out about something, and Edith had talked about all manner of things with Bloom to spite and annoy her. But Tekla was not the kind to let anybody make fun of her. She called him a cur and many other names, waving the three tenners under his nose and declaring

that he should never again get a farthing from her. Thereupon he snatched them with a sudden grab and went off. He knew that she dared not make any disturbance at night; the family might wake.

But next day in court she accused him of theft. He first denied it, but afterwards confessed and related the circumstances. The plaintiff's version of the affair, however, was altogether different: the thirty crowns had lain on the table, he had taken them without her seeing it, and she had never promised them to him. The one thing that became wholly clear was that he had taken them.

That gave him his first trip.

Afterwards he had lived as best he could—had worked sometimes, and sometimes starved and begged, till one evening he got the idea of stealing a jacket on East Street so as to escape the poor-house.

He had come down to Lilyholm Bridge. Milk-wagons rattled and shaggy peasant horses toiled painfully with their home-made carts up the steep abutment. From the hundred factory chimneys around the shore of Arstavik the smoke ascended quietly toward the welkin in straight columns, as from a sacrifice well-pleasing to the Lord. The Continental Express rushed southward along the railway embankment, its dining car full of break-

fasting travelers with anchovies on their forks. But in the peaceful nook between the bridge and the shore a family of ducks swam to and fro; some white, some speckled with the suggestion of a wild duck's plumage, while in the middle of the flock the drake stood on a floating plank on one foot with his head under his wing, asleep.

Bloom took a roll that he had brought with him from the restaurant on Brenchurch Street, crumbled it to pieces, and threw the pieces to the ducks. The flock at once grew more lively; even the drake lifted his head and opened one eye, but shut it again. He was quite white, and his shut eyelid was also white, so that Bloom had to think of the blank, uncanny marble eyes he had seen in the National Museum one Sunday many years ago. The others snapped among the bits of roll. One of them had got hold of a piece that was too big, so she dipped it into the water time after time in order to soften it and break it. Meanwhile another followed all her motions constantly with watchful eyes, and when at last the bit of roll slipped from the bill of the first, the other was instantly there and got it. There was no conflict; the first contented herself with following in turn and watching for a chance to recover the lost piece.

Bloom laughed aloud with delight.

Yes, that's right, he thought; he who has got

something must look out for what he has, or someone else will come and take it. He felt it almost as a consolation to see the innocent white creature perform with impunity and entire naturalness an act which in the language of mankind is known as theft, and for which he had had to suffer severely.

A speckled duck, enticed by the bits of roll, came swimming out from the shore at the apex of a flock of little ones, gray-brown fellows with hairy fluff and small, black, pearly-bright eyes like rats. Several small girls on the way to school with books in their hands stopped and surveyed them with delight and astonishment. "Look there! are those rats?" "No, can't you see? They're birds." "Only think, they aren't afraid of the water!"

"Those are ducklings," explained Bloom, adding a didactic tone: "They are formed to go in the water. It's no more remarkable for them to go in the water than for fish to swim."

"Really!" said the largest girl. And they bounded off on their way with little skips.

Bloom recalled a story which he had once read in a school book about an ugly duckling that was transformed into a swan. He sought for an application of this to himself and partly found it in his recent transformation at the barber shop

and the photographer's, but it did not seem to him fully satisfactory, and he muttered to himself as he passed on over the bridge: "Wait, I'll show them! Just wait."

It was very warm, and when he came to the other side of the bridge where nettles and burdocks were standing, gray with dust, by the edge of the road, he took off his jacket, stuck the crook of his stick through the loop, slung it over his shoulder, and went on out along the Lilyholm Road whistling a cheerful tune.

A little in front of him went a young woman with a bundle in her hand, and he hurried his steps so as to see how she looked from in front. As he came nearer, all at once his heart nearly stood still in his breast, for he thought it must be Edith. At the same moment she turned.

"No, if it isn't Valdemar!"

After the first expression of surprise had vanished from her face, she smiled affably and seemed not unpleasantly affected at seeing him. She was going to see an acquaintance who lived a little further out, and they went on together. He found her changed, fuller than before and redder in complexion, as if she had drunk a good deal of beer. She asked where he had been all the long time that they had not seen each other. He felt a certain satisfaction in her not seeming to

know of his "second trip," and he improvised something about a lengthy illness and employment for a while with a tailor in a neighboring town.

Edith chattered incessantly. She talked of common acquaintances and lamented over wrongs she had suffered. Tekla had been worst of all to her. But now she was married to a street-cleaner who had already drunk up her money and who beat her every day; and it served her right. She related besides a great deal about herself, but in a style that hardly seemed to make any pretence to veracity.

Bloom let her prattle and for his own part did not say much. He thought of the nine months he had spent in solitude.

He took her gently by the arm and guided her in on a path that led into the wood, and she grew silent in the midst of her talk and followed him without saying anything. The path led into a deep covert along a fence and hedge that enclosed a solitary orchard. From this orchard several big silver poplars spread their wide and lofty crowns. On the other side rose a fir-clad slope with mosses and ferns and dusky thickets. Over the tops of the firs a white summer cloud sailed slowly.

Bloom was awakened by a big raindrop which fell heavily on his right eyelid. He half raised

himself and rubbed his eyes—had he been asleep? He was alone, and it was raining. It did not rain hard as yet; these were only the first big drops, but a black cloud was hanging directly over him.

Where was Edith?

He had thrown his jacket with the stick a little to one side; he got up and put it on. Suddenly a horrible thought came over him and he made a swift grab at the breast pocket.

It was empty. The blue envelope was gone—the envelope with the money and the prison director's recommendations.

He felt a choking in his throat and a difficulty in breathing.

A sudden gust of wind shot through the leafage of the poplars like a lightning flash, and a raging squall of rain whipped him in the face.

THE FUR COAT

IT was a cold winter that year. People shrank up in the chill and grew smaller, all except those who had furs. Judge Richardt had a big fur coat. It almost belonged, moreover, to his official position, for he was managing director of a brand-new company. His old friend Dr. Henck, on the contrary, had no fur coat: he had instead a pretty wife and three children. Dr. Henck was thin and pale. Some people grow fat with marriage, others grow thin. Dr. Henck had grown thin, and remained so on this particular Christmas Eve.

I've had a bad year this year, said Dr. Henck to himself, as he was on his way to his old friend John Richardt to borrow money. It was three o'clock of Christmas Eve, just the hour of the mid-day twilight.—I've had a very bad year. My health is fragile, not to say broken. My patients, on the contrary, have picked up, almost the whole lot of them, I see them so seldom nowadays. Presumably I'm going to die soon. My wife thinks so, too; I've seen it in her looks. In such a case it would be desirable that the event

should happen before the end of January, when the cursed life insurance premium has to be paid.

By the time he had reached this point in the process of his thoughts he found himself on the corner of Government and Harbor Street. As he was about to pass the street-crossing in order to proceed down Government Street, he slipped on a smooth sleigh track and fell, and at the same moment a sleigh drove up at full speed. The driver swore and the horse instinctively turned aside, but Dr. Henck received a blow on the shoulder from one of the runners, and furthermore a screw or nail or some similar projection caught his overcoat and tore a big rent in it. People gathered around him. A policeman helped him to his feet, a young girl brushed the snow off him, an old woman gesticulated over his torn overcoat in a way that indicated she would have liked to sew it up on the spot if she could, and a prince of the royal house, who happened to be going by, picked up his cap and set it on his head. So everything was all right again except the coat.

"Lord! what a sight you are, Gustav," said Judge Richardt, when Henck came up to his office.

"Yes, I've been run over," answered Henck.

"That's just like you," said Richardt, laughing good-humoredly. "But you can't go home like

that. You may gladly have the loan of my fur coat, and I'll send a boy home after my ulster."

"Thanks," said Dr. Henck. And after he had borrowed the hundred krona he needed, he added, "We shall be glad to have you for dinner."

Richardt was a bachelor and was accustomed to spend Christmas Eve with Henck.

On the way home Henck was in a better humor than he had been for a long time.

That's on account of the fur coat, he said to himself. If I had been smart, I should have got myself a fur coat on credit long ago. It would have strengthened my self-esteem and raised me in the popular opinion. One can't pay such a small fee to a doctor in a fur coat as to a doctor in an ordinary overcoat with worn button-holes. It's a bother that I didn't happen to think of that before. Now it's too late.

He walked a stretch through King's Garden. It was dark already, it had begun to snow again, and the acquaintances he met did not recognize him.

Who knows, though, whether it's too late, Henck went on to himself. I'm not old yet, and I may have been mistaken about the question of my health. I'm poor as a little fox in the woods; but so was John Richardt not so long since. My wife has grown cold and unfriendly toward me in

these latter times. She would surely begin to love me afresh, if I could earn more money and if I were dressed in furs. It has seemed to me that she cared more for John since he got himself a fur coat than she did before. She was certainly a bit sweet on him when she was a young girl, too; but he never courted her. On the contrary he said to her and to everybody that he wouldn't dare to marry on less than ten thousand a year. But I dared, and Ellen was a poor girl who wanted to marry. I don't believe she was so much in love with me that I should have been able to seduce her if I had wished to. But I didn't want to, either; how could I have dreamed of that sort of love? I haven't thought of that since I was sixteen and saw Faust the first time at the opera with Arnoldson. I'm sure, though, she was fond of me when we were first married; one can't be mistaken about such a thing as that. Why couldn't she be again? In the first days after our marriage she always said spiteful things to John whenever they met. But then he built up a company, invited us often to the theatre, and got himself a fur coat. And so naturally in time my wife grew tired of saying spiteful things to him.

Henck had still several errands to do before dinner. It was already half past five when he

came home laden with parcels. He felt very tender in his left shoulder, otherwise there was nothing that reminded him of his mishap in the afternoon except the fur coat.

It'll be fun to see what my wife will do when she sees me in a fur coat, said Dr. Henck to himself.

The hall was quite dark; the lamp was never lighted unless visitors were expected.

I hear her in the parlor now, thought Dr. Henck. She walks as lightly as a little bird. It's remarkable that I still get warm around the heart every time I hear her step in the next room.

Dr. Henck was right in his supposition that his wife would give him a more loving reception when he had on a fur coat than she was otherwise wont to do. She stole up close to him in the darkest corner of the hall, twined her arms about his neck, and kissed him warmly and intensively. Then she burrowed her head into the collar of his fur coat and whispered: "Gustav isn't home yet."

"Yes," answered Dr. Henck in a voice that trembled slightly, while he caressed her hair with both hands, "yes, he's home."

A big fire flamed in Dr. Henck's work-room. Whisky and water stood on the table.

Judge Richardt lay stretched out in a large leather easy-chair and smoked a cigar. Dr.

Henck sat huddled in a corner of the sofa. The door was open on the hall, where Mrs. Henck and the children were busy lighting the Christmas tree.

Dinner had been very quiet. Only the children had twittered and prattled to one another and been happy.

"You're not saying anything, old fellow," said Richardt. "Is it that you're sitting worrying over your torn overcoat?"

"No," answered Henck, "it's rather over the fur coat."

There was a few minutes' silence before he continued:

"I'm thinking of something else, too. I'm sitting thinking that this is the last Christmas we shall celebrate together. I'm a doctor and I know I've not many days left. I know it now with full certainty. I want, therefore, to thank you for all the kindness you've shown me and my wife in these last times."

"Oh, you're mistaken," muttered Richardt, looking away.

"No," replied Henck, "I'm not mistaken. And I want also to thank you for lending me your fur coat. It has given me the last seconds of happiness I have known in my life."

THE BLUE ANCHOR

I

THERE was dancing in the salon, but in the darkened smoking-room sat several men who did not dance. The younger ones had white flowers in their button-holes, the older ones had decorations. In the corner of a sofa sat a man a little apart from the others; he sat very silent and smiled as at a happy dream. His face was brown, but his forehead was white. His frock coat was as correct as anyone else's, and he had also a white flower in his button-hole; but his left hand, which hung over the arm of the sofa, was tattooed with a blue anchor.

As a matter of fact it was not a ball; there had merely been a dinner, and afterwards there was dancing.

A man with a decoration was standing in front of him.

"You don't dance, Mr. Fant?" he inquired.

Fant replied, "I've just been dancing with Miss Gabel."

But as he said this, he felt that he blushed.

Why should he have added "with Miss Gabel." It was surely a matter of indifference with whom he had danced. Because he believed he had said something stupid, he was annoyed with the man to whom he had said it, and set to staring at his decoration without saying anything. Since this was a bogus foreign decoration of the worst sort, the man grew embarrassed, coughed drily, and passed on.

Fant remained seated and stared into a mirror which faced him on an oblique wall. But it was not himself that he saw in the mirror, it was the flooding light of the dancing hall and the sinuous lines of the women. They seemed to move silently in time with the music. Look at their red lips, look at the white curves of their arms!—

There she was again! For the third time she glided past across the mirror. It was her cousin she was dancing with, a boy, lately a student—ah, well!

No, he could not sit still, he could not look on any more. It surely signified nothing that the boy danced with his own cousin, but he could not look on. He rose and went out of the room.

Someone asked, "Who is this Mr. Fant?"

"He has invented something—a gas-burner, I believe. He is already on the way to make a fortune."

"But did you see," said the man with the

foreign order, "did you see that he has a blue anchor tattooed on one hand?"

They suddenly burst into guffaws.

II

He sauntered back and forth through the rooms. He went out into the corridor. A couple of Knights of Vasa were sitting on the wood-box talking about business while they gesticulated with two big cigars, on which they had left the labels. They grew silent as he passed.

He came into a greenish room that was half dark. From the roof on a narrow cord hung a single electric light, its glow shaded by blue and green fringes. On a dressing-table with a marble top an old Chinese mandarin of porcelain sat sleeping on his crossed legs.

How strangely far off the music sounded, as if from underneath!

He set the mandarin's head in motion with a little punch of his little finger. Two mirrors repeated in unending succession the pale and lethargic nods of the yellow head.

Now it was quiet, the music.

All at once she stood there, in the middle of the room. He had not heard her enter. She held out both hands to him. He took them and drew her to him for a kiss, but she freed herself almost immediately.

"Somebody's coming," she said.

They listened. Voices approached and moved away again.

When all was quiet around them, he pressed her to him in a long kiss. And he thought while she kissed him: This is life! This is eternity!

Far away in the green darkness nodded the pale head of the mandarin.

"No one kisses like you," he muttered.

"Many kiss like you," she responded, smiling.

He thought to himself: she's smiling so that I shall know she's jesting and that she has never kissed anyone else.

While he caressed her two small hands between his, he noticed that she was looking at his left hand.

"You are looking at the anchor," he said. "It's true that it is not handsome. And it won't come off."

She took his hand and surveyed inquisitively the blue dots that formed an anchor. But she said nothing.

"It was in Hamburg that was done," he said. "I was a ship's boy on a vessel. We had come ashore and gone into a tavern by the harbor. I remember it all so well: the fog, the many masts in the harbor, and the smell of the grease. My comrades were tattooed, on the hands, arms and body, and they thought I ought to have myself

tattooed also. I couldn't refuse, or they would have thought I was afraid of the pain, for it hurt a great deal. But I thought, too, it was stylish; I was hardly fourteen, you know."

"Are you tattooed on the body as well?" she asked.

Smilingly and somewhat unwillingly he answered, "Yes, I have on the breast a ship and a bird, which is supposed to be an eagle, though it's more like a rooster."

She looked long into his eyes, then slowly raised his hand to her lips and kissed the blue anchor.

III

Years passed, and one day Richard Fant said to his wife as they were dressing to go out to dinner, "Do you know, I think the blue anchor is beginning to fade. Perhaps it's on the way to vanish entirely."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that," she answered.

In reality her thoughts were in another direction. She was thinking of her cousin, Tom Gabel, who was an attaché at the embassy in Madrid. He had now been home for two months on a visit and had promised to come and fetch them so as to go together to the dinner.

"Hurry up," she said, "so that Tom won't have to wait for you."

"I'm all ready," he replied.

He had sat down in a corner in the shadow, fully dressed. She turned and scanned his attire.

"You've forgotten your decoration," she remarked.

"I don't want my decoration," he responded.

"But Richard! could you be so discourteous to Tom, who got it for you?"

He went after his decoration. It was not one of the very worst, not an order of Christus or a Nichan Iftikar; it was a medium good decoration, a quite nice decoration. He fastened it on the lapel of his coat with the feeling that perhaps he really needed it, seeing that he had a blue anchor on his left hand.

IV

There was a dance after the dinner, but Fant remained sitting in a sofa corner of the smoking-room. By his side sat the man whom he had formerly annoyed by staring at his foreign decoration, but he was now a Knight Commander. They had become good friends and called each other by their first names when they said anything to each other, but they said nothing. They merely sat each in his corner of the sofa and smoked big cigars with labels and understood each other perfectly.

The doctors had forbidden Fant to smoke

strong cigars, because he had a bad heart. But he had just lighted the third since dinner.

In the mirror on the middle of the opposite wall he saw the revolving of the dancers and the flood of light from the hall. He had often wondered how it was that they seemed to dance as though on felt or soft greensward, soundlessly. He understood now that it came from his seeing them in the mirror. Because the picture struck him from another quarter than the clatter and the music, he did not connect them, and over the flooring reflected in the mirror the dance appeared to go without noise. Look at the girls' white dresses! behold their panting bosoms!——

He recollected that he had once seen her who was now his wife float past, as they did, in a girl's plain white ball-dress. She was differently clad now.

See! there she was, sure enough, with him, her cousin. She remained standing a moment in the doorway, erect, slender, and delicate as always. She seemed as if quite naked under the stiff, variegated silk in which she had wrapped her body, and which was only held together by clasps at the shoulders and waist. They bent their heads together and whispered.

No, he must move about a bit, stretch his legs a little.—It is not good to sit still too long after a big dinner and smoke three black cigars.

He lighted the fourth and began to saunter back and forward through the room.

He went out into the corridor. Three young men with white flowers in their button-holes sat on the wood-box with cigarettes in holders and talked about women, but they became silent as he went past. He opened the door to the little green cabinet and went in. It was empty. He set the mandarin's yellow head in motion with a push of his knuckle and passed on to the window.

The window-pane breathed frost and wintry chill. He blew on it till there was a peep-hole between the ice-flowers, put his eye to the glass, and looked out. The sky was dark and glittering with stars. Highest up stood the Dipper with its handle aloft.

It was late, then.

He could not force himself to leave the room, because he felt a bitter and devouring desire for his wife and the kiss of old times, the kiss under the blue-green light from pearl fringe of the single electric light, the kiss which the mandarin had beheld in his nodding half-slumber. If she would only come now, precisely now! No one could kiss as she did, no one. He had kissed other women since she no longer loved him; but he had forgotten them all, he would not recognize them if he met them on the street. If she would only come! Yes, even if she but came to

meet the other, even then he would take her forced and treacherous kiss as a boon, even then—

He listened. Whispering voices were audible outside the door, but they grew silent all at once and remained so.

He had a strange sensation at his heart, he felt that in a couple of seconds he would lie stretched on the carpet, unconscious, but he held himself upright, and suddenly he heard from the entry where the young men were smoking their cigarettes a very clear voice which said: "Well, after all it's only natural. One can't expect her to be in love with someone who has a blue anchor tattooed on his hand."

V

The coffin stood in the middle of the room. The black-clad woman walked back and forth, back and forth.

"No, he's not coming——"

When he finally did come, he said, "Pardon me, beloved. I was delayed by someone who came to call——"

She nodded stiffly. She did not believe him, because he had not kissed her.

When he felt that they had stood too long silent, he said, "I must be off tomorrow. I've had a telegram from the minister.—But I swear

to you that I'll come back," he added in a somewhat lowered voice as if he did not wish that the dead man should hear.

She comprehended that he was lying and that he never meant to see her again. And she nodded.

"Good-bye," she said.

When he had gone, she went forward to the head of the coffin and looked at the dead man without thinking any further, for she was too weary. But as she stood there she remembered suddenly that she had loved him. She had loved other men too, but it came to her now that she had loved this one most. At that thought she felt the tears rise from deep down in her heart; she took his left hand, the one with the blue anchor, and wetted it with her kisses and her tears.

THE KISS

THERE was once a young girl and a very young man. They sat on a stone on a promontory that ran out into the lake, and the waves splashed at their feet. They sat silent, each wrapped in thought, and watched the sun go down.

He thought that he should very much like to kiss her. When he looked at her mouth, it occurred to him that this was just what it was meant for. He had, to be sure, seen girls prettier than she was, and he was really in love with someone else; but this other he could surely never kiss, because she was an ideal, a star, and what availed "the desire of the moth for the star"?

She thought that she should very much like to have him kiss her, so that she might have occasion to be downright angry with him and show how deeply she despised him. She would get up, pull her skirts tightly round her, give him a glance brimmed with icy contempt, and go off, erect and calm, without any unnecessary haste. But in order that he might not divine what she thought, she asked in a low, soft voice, "Do you think there is another life after this?"

He thought it would be easier to kiss her if he said yes. But he could not remember for certain what he might have said on other occasions about the same subject, and he was afraid of contradicting himself. He therefore looked her deep in the eyes and answered, "There are times when I think so."

This answer pleased her extraordinarily, and she thought: At least I like his hair—and his forehead, too. It's only a pity his nose is so ugly, and then of course he has no standing—he's just a student who is reading for his examinations. That was not the sort of beau to vex her friends with.

He thought: Now I can certainly kiss her. He was, nevertheless, terribly afraid; he had never before kissed a girl of good family, and he wondered if it might not be dangerous. Her father was lying asleep in a hammock a little way off, and he was the mayor of the town.

She thought: Perhaps it will be still better if I give him a box on the ear when he kisses me.

And she thought again: Why doesn't he kiss me? Am I so ugly and disagreeable?

She leaned forward over the water to see her reflection, but her image was broken by the splashing of the water.

She thought again: I wonder how it will feel when he kisses me. As a matter of fact she had

only been kissed once, by a lieutenant after a ball at the town hotel. He had smelt so abominably of punch and cigars that she had felt but little flattered, although to be sure he was a lieutenant, but otherwise she had not much cared for the kiss. Furthermore she hated him because he had not been attentive to her afterwards or indeed shown any interest in her at all.

While they sat so, each engrossed in private thoughts, the sun went down and it grew dark.

And he thought: Seeing that she is still sitting with me, though the sun is gone and it has become dark, it may be that she wouldn't so much object to my kissing her.

Then he laid his arm softly around her neck.

She had not expected this at all. She had imagined he would merely kiss her and nothing more, and with that she would give him a box on the ear and go off like a princess. Now she didn't know what she should do; she wanted of course to be angry with him, but at the same time she didn't want to lose the kiss. She therefore sat quite still.

Thereupon he kissed her.

It felt much more strange than she had supposed. She felt that she was growing pale and faint, she entirely forgot that she was to give him a box on the ear and that he was only a student reading for his examination.

But he thought of a passage in a book by a religious physician on "The Sex Life of Woman," which read: "One must guard against letting the marital embrace come under the dominion of sensuality." And he thought that this must be very difficult to guard against, if even a kiss could do so much.

When the moon came up, they were still sitting there and kissing.

She whispered into his ear: "I loved you from the first hour I saw you."

And he replied: "There has never been anyone in the world for me but you."

THE DREAM OF ETERNITY

WHILE I was still very young I believed with entire certainty that I had an immortal soul. I regarded this as a holy and precious gift and was both happy and proud over it.

I often said to myself: "The life I am living is a dark and troubled dream. Some time I shall awaken to another dream which stands closer to reality and has a deeper meaning than this. Out of that dream I shall awaken to a third and afterwards to a fourth, and every new dream will stand nearer the truth than the one before. This approaching toward truth constitutes the meaning of life, which is subtle and profound."

With the joy of knowing that in my immortal soul I possessed a capital which could not be lost in play or distrained upon for debt, I carried on a dissipated life and squandered like a prince both what was mine and what was not mine.

But one evening I found myself with some of my cronies in a large hall, which glittered with gilt and electric light, while from its flooring rose a smell of decay. Two young girls with painted

faces and an old woman whose wrinkles were filled with plaster were dancing there on a platform, accompanied by the wail of the orchestra, cries of applause, and the clink of broken glass. We watched the women, drank a great deal, and conversed on the immortality of the soul.

"It's foolish," said one of my comrades who was older than I, "it's foolish to believe that it would be a blessing to have an immortal soul. Look at that old harridan dancing there, whose head and hands tremble if she stays still a moment. One sees directly that she is wicked and ugly and entirely worthless, and that she's getting more and more so every day. How ridiculous it would be to imagine that she had an immortal soul! But the case is just the same with you and me and all of us. What a mean joke it would be to give us immortality!"

"The thing that I dislike most in what you say," I answered, "isn't that you deny the immortality of the soul, but the fact that you find a pleasure in denying it. Human beings are like children that play in a garden surrounded by a high wall. Time and again a door is opened in the wall, and one of the children disappears through the door. People then tell them that it is taken to another garden bigger and more beautiful than this, whereupon they listen a moment in silence and afterwards continue to play among

the flowers. Assume now that one of the boys is more inquisitive than the others and climbs up on the wall so as to see where his comrades go, and when he comes down again tells the rest what he has seen; namely, that outside the gate sits a giant who devours the children when they are taken out. And they all have to be taken out through the gate in due turn! You are that boy, Martin, and I find it unspeakably ridiculous that you tell what you think you've seen, not in a spirit of despair, but as if you were proud and glad of knowing more than the rest."

"The younger of those girls is very pretty," replied Martin.

"It's dreadful to be annihilated, and it's also dreadful not to be able to be annihilated," remarked another of my friends.

Martin continued this line of argument.

"Yes," he said, "one should be able to find a middle course. Gird up your loins and go out to look for a midway degree between time and eternity. He who finds it may found a new religion, for he'll then have the most enticing bait that a fisher of men ever possessed."

The orchestra stopped with a clash. The gold of the hall glittered more faintly through the tobacco smoke and through the floor boards pressed continuously a smell of decay.

The party broke up and we separated, each

in his own direction. I wandered a long while back and forth on the streets; I came upon streets which I did not recognize and which I have never seen since, remarkably desolate and empty streets, where the houses seemed to open their lines to give me space whithersoever I turned my steps, and then to close up again behind my back. I did not know where I had got to, before all of a sudden I stood in front of my own door. It stood wide open. I went in through the door and up the stairs. At one of the stair windows I stopped and looked at the moon: I had not previously noticed that there was moonlight that evening.

But I have never either before or after seen the moon look so. One could not say that it shone. It was ashen-gray and pallid and unnaturally big. I stood a long while and stared at yonder moon, despite the fact that I was dreadfully tired and longed to get to sleep.

I lived in the third story. When I had gone up two flights I thanked God there was only one left. But as I came up this flight, it struck me that the corridor was not dark, as it had always used to be, but faintly lighted like the other corridors where the moon glimmered in through the stair windows. But there were only three flights of stairs in the house besides the attic stairs; for that reason the uppermost corridor was always dark.

"The door of the attic is open," I said to myself. "The light is coming from the attic stairway. It's unexcusable of the servants to leave the door of the attic open, for thieves might get up into the attic."

But there was no attic door. There was only an ordinary stairway like the others.

I had counted wrong, then; I had still a flight to go up.

But when I had mounted this flight and stood in the corridor, I had to control myself so as not to shriek aloud. For this corridor, too, was light, neither was there any attic door open, but a new stairway led up just as before. Through the stair window the moon glimmered in, and it was ashen-gray and lustreless and unnaturally big.

I rushed up the stairway. I could no longer think. I tottered up another, and yet another; I did not count them any longer.

I wanted to cry out, I wanted to wake that accursed house and see human beings around me; but my throat was constricted.

Suddenly it occurred to me to try if I could read the names on the door-plates. What kind of people could it be that lived in this tower of Babel? The moonlight was too faint; I struck a match and held it close to a brass plate.

I read there the name of one of my friends who was dead.

Then the bonds of my tongue were loosed and I shrieked: "Help! help! help!"

That cry was my salvation, for it waked me up out of the terrible dream of eternity.

THE DRIZZLE

AUTUMN is here again with its dismal days, and the sun is hiding himself in the darkest corner of the heavens so that no one shall see how pale and aged and worn he has grown in this latter time. But while the wind whistles in the window-chinks and the rain purls in the rain-spouts and a wet dog howls in front of a closed gate down below on the street and before the fire has burned down in our tile stove, I will tell you a story about the drizzle.

Listen now!

For some time back the good God had become so angered over the wickedness of men that he resolved to punish them by making them still more wickeder. He should, in his great goodness, have liked above all things to have drowned them all together in a new Deluge: he had not forgotten how agreeable was the sight when all living creatures perished in the flood. But unfortunately in a sentimental moment he had promised Noah never to do so again.

"Harken, my friend!" he therefore said to the Devil one day. "You are assuredly no saint, but occasionally you have good ideas, and one can

talk things over with you. The children of men are wicked and do not want to improve. My patience, which is infinite, has now come to an end, and I have resolved to punish them by making them wickeder still. The fact is I hope they will then collectively destroy each other and themselves. It occurs to me that our interests—otherwise so far apart—should here for once find a point of contact. What advice can you give me?"

The Devil bit the end of his tail reflectively.

"Lord," he answered finally, "Thy wisdom is as great as Thy goodness. Statistics show that the greatest number of crimes are committed in the autumn, when the days are dismal, the sky is gray, and the earth is enveloped in rain and mist."

The good God pondered these words a long while.

"I understand," he said finally. "Your advice is good, and I will follow it. You have good gifts, my friend, but you should make better use of them."

The Devil smiled and wagged his tail, for he was flattered and touched. He then limped home.

But the good God said to himself: "Hereafter it shall always drizzle. The clouds shall never clear, the mist never lift, the sun never shine more. It shall be dark and gray to the end of time."

The umbrella makers and the overshoes manufacturers were happy at the start, but it was not long before the smile froze upon even their lips. People do not know what importance fair weather has for them until they are for once compelled to do without it. The gay became melancholy. The melancholy became mad and hanged themselves in long rows or assembled to hold prayer-meetings. Soon no one worked any more, and the need became great. Crime increased in a dizzying scale; the prisons were overcrowded, the madhouses afforded room for only the clever. The number of the living decreased, and their dwellings stood deserted. They instituted capital punishment for suicide; nothing did any good.

Mankind, who for so many generations had dreamed and poetized about an eternal spring, now went to meet their last days through an eternal autumn.

Day by day the destruction went on. Countrysides were laid waste, cities fell in ruins. Dogs gathered in the squares and howled; but in the alleys an old lame man went about from house to house with a sack on his back and collected souls. And every evening he limped home with his sack full.

But one evening he did not limp home. He went instead to the gate of heaven and straight

on to the good God's throne. There he stood still, bowed, and said:

"Lord, Thou hast aged in these latter days. We have both of us aged, and it is for that reason we are so dull. Ah! Lord, that was bad advice I gave Thee. The sins that interest me need a bit of sunlight once in a while in order to flourish. Look here! you've made me into a miserable rubbish-gatherer."

With these words he flung his dirty sack so violently against the steps of the throne that the cord broke and the souls fluttered out. They were not black, but gray.

"That's the last of the human souls," said the Devil. "I give them to Thee, Lord. But beware of using them, if Thou intendest to create a new world!"

The wind whistles in the window chinks, the rain purls in the rain-spouts, and the story is done. He who has not understood it may console himself with the thought that it will be fair weather tomorrow.

THE DRAWING IN INDIA INK

ONE day in April many years ago, in the time when I still wondered about the meaning of life, I went into a little cigar booth on a back street to buy a cigar. I selected a dark and angular El Zelo, stuffed it into my case, paid for it, and made ready to go. But at that moment it occurred to me to show the young girl who stood in the booth, and of whom I used often to buy my cigars, a little sketch in India ink, which I happened to have lying in a portfolio. I had got it from a young artist, and to my thinking it was very fine.

"Look here," said I, handing it to her. "What do you think of that?"

She took it in her hand with interested curiosity and looked at it very long and closely. She turned it in various directions, and her face took on an expression of strained mental activity.

"Well, what does it mean?" she asked finally with an inquisitive glance.

I was a little surprised.

"It doesn't mean anything in particular," I answered. "It's just a landscape. That's the

ground and that's the sky and that there is a road—an ordinary road——"

"Yes, I can see that," she interrupted in a somewhat unfriendly tone; "but I want to know what it *means*."

I stood there embarrassed and irresolute; I had never happened to think that it ought to mean anything. But her idea was not to be removed; she had now got it into her head that the picture must be some sort of "Where is the cat?" affair. Why otherwise should I have shown it to her? At last she set it up against the window-pane so as to make it transparent. Presumably someone had once shown her a peculiar kind of playing card, which in an ordinary light represents a nine of diamonds or a knave of spades, but which, when one holds it up against the light, displays something indecent.

But her investigation brought no result. She gave back the sketch, and I prepared to leave. Then all at once the poor girl grew very red in the face and burst out, with a sob in her throat:

"Shame on you! it's real mean of you to make a fool of me like that. I know very well I'm a poor girl, and haven't been able to get myself a better education, but still you don't need to make a fool of me. Can't you tell me what your picture means?"

What was I to answer? I should have given

much to be able to tell her what it meant; but I could not, for it meant precisely nothing.

Ah, well, that was many years ago. I now smoke other cigars, which I buy in another shop, and I no longer wonder about the meaning of life—but that is not because I think I have found it.

THE WAGES OF SIN

THIS is the story of a young girl and an apothecary with a white vest.

She was young and slim, she smelled of pine woods and heather, and her complexion was sunburned and a trifle freckled. So she was when I knew her. But the apothecary was a quite ordinary apothecary; he wore a white vest on Sundays, and on a Sunday this attracted attention. It attracted attention in a place in the country so far away from the world that no one in that region was so sophisticated as to wear a white vest on Sundays except the apothecary.

This, you see, was how it happened that one Sunday morning there was a knock at my door, and when I opened it, the apothecary stood outside in his white vest and bowed several times. He was very polite and very much embarrassed.

"I beg your most humble pardon," he said, "but Miss Erika was here yesterday with her sisters while you were away, and when she went, she left her poetry book for you and me to write something in it. Here it is. But I don't know at all what to write. Could you perhaps

kindly——?" And he bowed again several times.

"We will think the matter over," I answered in a friendly tone.

I took the book therefore and for my own share inscribed a translation of "Du bist wie eine Blume," which I had made myself and which I always use for that purpose. I then began to search among my papers to see if by any chance I had some old verses from my school days which would suit for the apothecary. Finally I came upon the following bad poem:

You set my thoughts in turmoil,
I wither in longing's blight.
In solitude you haunt me,
I dreamed of you in the night.

I dreamed that we walked together
Side by side in the twilight dim,
And through your lowered lashes
I saw the bright tear swim.

I kissed your cheek and your eyelids,
I saw the tear-drop fall,
But oh, your red, red lips, love—
I kissed them most of all.

One cannot always dream sweetly.
Small rest since then have I known,
For, sorrowful oft and weary,
I watch through the night-hours alone.

Alas! your cheeks so soft, love,
I touch but with glances trist,
And those red lips, my darling,
I never, never have kissed.

I showed the apothecary this poem and offered to let him use it. He read it through attentively twice and blushed all over with delight.

"Did you really write that yourself?" he inquired in his simplicity of heart.

"Yes, I'm sorry to admit."

He thanked me very warmly for the permission to use the poem, and when he went out of the room I imagine we both had the feeling that we must drop the formality of "mister" at the first opportunity.

That evening there was a little party at the girl's house. Young folks were there. We drank cherry syrup on a veranda festooned with hop-vines.

I sat and looked at the young girl.

No, she was not like herself. Her eyes were bigger and more restless than usual and her mouth was redder. And she could not sit still on her chair.

From time to time she cast a furtive glance at me, but more often she looked at the apothecary. And the apothecary looked that evening like a turkey-cock.

When the punch was passed around, we dropped the "mister."

We young people went down on the meadow to play games. We tossed rings and played other games, and meanwhile the sun went down behind the hills and it grew dark.

We had laid the rings and the sword in a heap on the ground and were now standing in groups, whispering and smiling, while the dusk came on. But the young girl came up to me through the dusk and took me aside behind a shed.

"You must answer me a question," said she. "Did the druggist really write his verses himself?" Her voice trembled, and she tried to look away as she spoke.

"Yes," I said. "He wrote them last night. I heard him going back and forth in his room all night."

But when I had said that, I felt a sting in my conscience, for I saw that she was a pretty and lovable child and that it was a great sin to deceive her so.

Who knows, I said to myself, who knows? Perhaps this is the sin of which the Scripture says that it cannot be forgiven.

The twilight deepened, it became night, and a star burned between the trees in the wood, where we were walking in pairs.

But I was alone.

I do not remember any more where I went that evening. I separated from the others and went deeper into the wood.

But deep within the wood among the firs I saw a birch with a shining white stem. By the stem stood two young people kissing, and I saw that one of them was the young girl who smelled of pine woods and heather. But the other was the apothecary, and he was a quite ordinary apothecary with a white vest. He held her pressed against the white stem of the birch and kissed her.

But when he had kissed her three times, I went away and wept bitterly.

COMMUNION

IT happened when I was hardly more than a boy.

It was on a blustering autumn evening on board a coast steamer. We had not yet come in from the country, and I had to go in and out of town to school. I had been lazy as usual and was to be examined in several subjects in order to be promoted into a higher class.

I went back and forward on the deck in the darkness, with collar turned up and hands in my coat pockets, thinking of my reverses at school. I was almost sure to flunk. As I leaned forward over the railing and saw how the foam hissed whitely and the starboard lantern threw sparkling green reflections on the black water, I felt tempted to jump overboard. Then at least the mathematics teacher would be sorry for the way he had tormented me—then, when it was too late——

But in the end it grew cold outside, and when I thought I had been freezing long enough, I went into the smoking cabin.

In my imagination I can still see the warm, comfortable interior which met my view when I

opened the door. The lighted ceiling-lamp swung slowly back and forth like a pendulum. On the table steamed four whiskey toddies, four cigars puffed, and four gentlemen were telling smutty stories. I recognized them all as neighbors of our summer sojourn: a company director, an old clergyman, a leading actor, and a button dealer. I bowed politely and threw myself down in a corner. I had, to be sure, a slight feeling that my presence might perhaps be superfluous; but on the other hand it would have been asking too much of me to go out into the wind and freeze when there was so much room in the cabin. Furthermore I knew within myself that I might very well contribute to the entertainment if necessary.

The four men looked askance at me with a certain coolness, and there was a pause.

I was sixteen and had recently been confirmed. People have told me that at that time I had a guileless and innocent appearance.

The pause, however, was not long. A few swallows from the glasses, a few puffs at the cigars, and the exchange of opinions was once more in full swing. A peculiar circumstance struck me, though: all the stories that were told I had already heard innumerable times, and for my part I found them comparatively flat. Smutty stories may, as is well known, be divided into two chief groups, one of which concentrates itself

mostly about digestive processes and circumstances related to them, whereas, on the contrary, the other, which stands incomparably higher in degree, has preferably to do with woman. I and my schoolmates had long since left the former group behind us; I was therefore the more surprised to hear these mature gentlemen give it their liveliest interest, while the other, much more appealing group was passed over in silence. I did not understand it. Could this possibly be out of any undue consideration for me? I need not say to what extent the suspicion of such a thing provoked me. The lively tone of the cabin had affected me and made me venturesome, so that I resolved to put an end to this childishness.

"Look here, uncle," I burst out quite impulsively during a silence after a story which was so harmless that even the clergyman guffawed at it, "don't you remember the story the captain told day before yesterday?"

"Uncle" was the company director, who was a friend of my father.

I continued undismayed: "That was the choicest I've heard in all my days. Couldn't you please tell it?"

Four pairs of astonished eyes were directed upon me, and a painful silence set in. I already regretted my rash courage.

The company director broke the ice with a

skittish little chuckle, which was but a faint echo of the thunder he had allowed to roll out a couple of days before when the captain had told the story.

"Tee-hee!—yes, that wasn't so bad——"

He then began to tell it. It was very highly seasoned and had to do with woman.

The leading actor at first hid his feelings behind his customary mask of dignified seriousness, whereas on the other hand the button dealer, an old buck who had grown gray in sin, regarded me with a sort of furtive interest, in which was an element of increased respect for my personality.

But when the anecdote began to take a somewhat precarious turn, it was suddenly interrupted by the clergyman, a kindly old man with a pious and childlike expression on his elderly smooth-shaven countenance.

"Pardon the interruption, my good brother, but"—and he turned a little in his chair so that he could direct his words at me—"how old, may I ask, is this young man? Has he been to Our Lord's—to Communion?"

I felt that I flushed blood-red. I had forgotten that there was a clergyman in the company.

"Y-yes," I stammered almost inaudibly. "I was confirmed last winter."

"Indeed!" returned the old clergyman, while he slowly stirred his glass of toddy.

Then without looking up, in a voice which forty years of mediation between God and the world had impressed with the mild tone of tolerance and indulgence, he continued:

"Go on, my dear brother! Excuse the interruption!"

THE CLOWN

YESTERDAY a familiar face flitted by me on the street. It was pale and had a tired expression, but the features were sharp and strongly marked.

I did not recall his name. I was sure I had seen him sometime, perhaps a long while ago, but I could not remember when or under what circumstances. His face had aroused my interest without my being able to explain why, and I dug all sorts of old recollections out of the junk-room of my memory in order to identify him, but in vain.

In the evening I was at the theatre. There to my surprise I found him again on the stage in a minor rôle. He was but little disguised; I recognized him at once and looked for his name on the program. I found it, but it was unknown to me. I followed his acting with tense interest. He took the part of a miserably stupid and ridiculous servant, whom everybody made fun of. The rôle was as wretched as the piece, and he played it mechanically and conventionally; but in certain intonations his voice assumed a sharp and bitter character which did not belong to the part.

They re-echoed in my ear, those tones, till late into the night, as I went back and forth in my room. And with their help I at last succeeded in digging up the recollection with which they belonged. I discovered that we had been schoolmates, but he was many years younger than I; when I was in the highest class, he was in one of the lowest.

When I was in the top class of the school, I was one day standing at the window toward the end of a lunch recess. Recesses at the school were an especial abomination of mine; I could never find anything to do. I knew that I did not know my lesson, and I could not set myself to going over it. The slight vexation I felt about the coming lesson always faded before a greater: a vexation about life, a gnawing premonition that the days to follow would be as empty and meaningless as those which had passed.

So I was walking back and forth with my hands in my jacket pockets, now and then stopping at the window, which was open. As I stood there, my attention was caught by a peculiar occurrence which was taking place down in the yard just below the window. A little boy in one of the lowest classes, a lad of ten or eleven, lay stretched on his back, surrounded by a crowd of other boys in a ring. Their faces, most of them at any rate, had

the expression of evil curiosity which children and uncultured people do not know how to conceal. A little broad-shouldered fellow with high cheek-bones, who gave the impression of being very strong for his age, stood in the ring with a whip in his hand.

"You are my slave," he said to the boy on the ground, "aren't you? Say: 'I am your slave!' "

"I am your slave," answered the child without hesitating; which indicated that this was not the first time he had said it.

"Get up," ordered the other.

The boy got up.

"Imitate B., the way he looks when he comes into class!"

B. was a teacher who went on crutches. The boy went a couple of steps outside the ring, which opened to give him space; then he came back on the improvised stage and executed as he did so the movements of a man walking on crutches. He did his part very well; the illusion was complete, and the onlookers applauded, but the little actor stood there with a serious expression. He had a pallid little face and black clothes; perhaps he had just lost his father or mother.

"Laugh!" ordered the other with a light flick of the whip which he had in his hand.

The boy tried to obey, but it did not come easily. The laugh sounded forced at the start,

but it was not long before he succeeded in laughing himself into a genuine, quite natural guffaw, and with that he turned toward his "master," as if it was at him that he laughed. But the latter already desired to have his slave show off new accomplishments.

"Say: 'My farsher is a damned scoundrel!'"

The boy looked around the circle with a helpless glance. When he saw that no one gave a semblance of wanting to help him, and that, on the contrary, all stood in eager expectation of something really amusing, he said as low as he dared:

"My farsher is a damned scoundrel."

That drew unbounded applause.

"Laugh—Cry!"

The child began to simulate weeping, but with that he now came into the mood he was ordered to imagine. The weeping stuck in his throat, and he shed actual tears.

"Let him be!" said an older boy in the circle, "he's crying in earnest."

And with that the school bell rang.

Some days afterwards he ran past me on the way from school. I noticed that his jacket was ripped open in the back.

"Wait a bit!" I said to him, "your jacket has split open in the back."

"No," he said, "it hasn't split open, they have cut it open with a penknife."

"Have they dirtied your book for you, too?" I asked.

"Yes, they've laid it in the gutter."

"Why are they so mean to you?"

"I don't know. They are stronger than I am."

He knew of no other reason. But of course that was not the only one; they must have found something in him that irritated them. I saw it in him that he was not like the others. The exceptional, the divergent always irritates children and mobs. A school-boy's eccentricities are punished by the teacher with a well-intended monition or a dry satiric smile; but by his comrades they are punished with kicks and cuffs and a bloody nose, with a torn jacket, a cap carefully laid under a rain-spout, and his best book thrown into the gutter.

Well, he is an actor now; that was surely his natural predestination. He now talks from the stage to a large public. It would be strange if sometime he did not make his way; I believe he has talent. Perhaps he will gradually transform his peculiarity to a pattern, according to which others try to conform as to an inoffensive regular verb.

SIGNY

SIGNY was a little girl about as old as I, with a pink dress and a pink ribbon in her hair. Her hair was dark, with curly locks, and she had dark blue starry eyes with long lashes. She was not at all angelic. I didn't care a great deal for angels, perhaps in especial because they always had fair hair. I had fair hair myself at that time, like most children, and light hair wasn't much, I thought.

But I thought an awful lot of Signy. I could go about thinking of her for whole days. It was not seldom that she did something naughty, which I was blamed for, and sometimes I myself took the blame voluntarily. I cared no less for her on that account, but only wished that she would do more naughty things and I get the blame for them. But what was that bit of deviltry she hit upon? Let me think.—She ran off and hid somewhere where we were forbidden to go, in some dangerous place where there might be trolls and spooks. One time I remember clearly that she wheedled me into playing with matches—playing with fire, the most dangerous and most strictly forbidden thing

there was. Didn't she set fire to an old dry bush in the garden? Why, to be sure she did; and I got the switch from mother. Oh, how I cared for Signy. And sometimes she said words that shouldn't be said. The shivers went up and down my back, but I only wanted her to say them again.

I don't know just where she lived. It wasn't in the same house as we did; the other children whom I played with didn't know her. But she must have lived in the same street—I suppose—in a little home with a garden surrounded by a fence. Or did she live in a garret cupola obliquely across the street, with flowers on the window-sill?—I may just as well say right out that she didn't live anywhere. She existed only in my imagination.

Signy was the first creation of my fancy, at least the first I can recall. I was a good six or seven years old, and at the age (just as, besides, at sixty, seventy or more) one often thinks aloud. To be brief, I went about prattling to myself as I imagined things about Signy, and one fine day it happened, of course, that my mother heard me.

"Listen to the boy," she said to my father. "Listen how he goes around talking to himself!"

And to me she said, "What is it you go around talking about? What are you thinking about?"

Grown-ups have a terrible passion for asking children the most inconsiderate questions. I ran off and hid.

Another day it was the same story, and still another day. Pain and embarrassment, questions that couldn't be answered.

My father said to me, "Other children talk to themselves up to four and five years old; you are too big for that."

I perceived that things couldn't go on any longer so; something must be done. It occurred to me that it was the sibilant sound that betrayed me: Signy, Signy; that wouldn't do. So I changed Signy's name to Ida. In that way I succeeded in having her sometimes in peace, but Ida never really got the same power of enchantment over me as Signy. One fine day we became enemies, I quarreled with her and called her a silly girl, and perhaps I even went so far as to scratch her. I regretted it to be sure but wouldn't ask her pardon, and soon after I let her go to the deuce. At the same time I learned to think in silence —and with a few exceptions have continued to do so.

But whence had I got Signy? In the same house with us lived a little girl, with whom I sometimes played. Her mother was in the ballet, and once she dressed herself in one of her mother's ballet skirts. But she was neither Signy nor Ida, she performed no deviltries and had none of Signy's magic power over my heart. I must, then, at the age of seven have created Signy as

the German creates a camel: out of the depths of my consciousness.

Then, too, I was predestined.

After that the years rolled on, and my genuinely literary impulses arrived, only quite late. The first strong urge came when one of my schoolmates —it was the present Professor Almqvist at the Caroline Institute—during a lesson in Mother Tongue declaimed with powerful effect Viktor Rydberg's "Flying Dutchman." I became wild with enthusiasm and for months afterwards dreamed of nothing else than being able at some period in the remote future to write something equally fine.

So far I haven't succeeded, but why should one give up hope?

A MASTERLESS DOG

A MAN died, and after he was dead no one looked after his black dog. The dog mourned him long and bitterly. He did not, however, lie down to die on his master's grave; possibly because he did not know where it was; possibly, too, because he was at bottom a young and happy dog, who considered that there was still something left for him in life.

There are two kinds of dogs: dogs that have a master, and dogs that have none. Outwardly the difference is not material; a masterless dog may be as fat as others, often fatter. No, the difference lies in another direction. Mankind is for dogs the infinite, providence. To obey a master, to follow him, rely upon him—that is, so to speak, the meaning of a dog's existence. To be sure, he has not his master in his thoughts every minute of the day, nor does he always follow close at his heels. No, he often runs about of his own accord with business-like intent, sniffs around the corners of houses, makes alliance with his kind, snatches a bone, if it comes in his way, and concerns himself about much. Yet on the instant that his master

whistles, all this is out of his canine head more quickly than the scourge drove the hucksters out of the temple, for he knows that there is but one thing he must attend to. So forgetting his house-corner and his bone and his companions, he hurries to his master.

The dog whose master died without the dog's knowing how, and who was buried without the dog's knowing where, mourned him long; but as the days passed and nothing occurred to remind him of his master, he forgot him. He no longer perceived the scent of his master's footsteps on the street where he lived. As he rolled about on a grass plot with a comrade, it often happened that a whistle pierced the air, and in that instant his comrade had vanished like the wind. Then he pricked up his ears, but no whistle resembled his master's. So he forgot him, and he forgot still more: he forgot that he had ever had a master. He forgot that there had ever been a time when he would not have regarded it as possible for a dog to live without a master. He became what one would call a dog that had seen better days, though it was in the inner meaning of the expression, for outwardly he got along fairly well. He lived as a dog does live: he now and then stole a good meal in the square, and got beaten, and had love affairs, and lay down to sleep when he was tired. He made friends and enemies. One

day he thoroughly thrashed a dog that was weaker than he, and another day he was badly handled by one that was stronger. Early in the morning one might see him run out along his master's street, where out of habit he mostly continued to resort. He ran straight forward with an air of having something important to attend to; smelt in passing a dog that he met, but was not eager to follow up the acquaintance; then continued his journey; but all at once sat down and scratched himself behind the ear with intense energy. The next moment he started up and flew right across the street to chase a red cat down into a cellar window; whereupon, re-assuming his business manner, he proceeded on his way and vanished around the corner.

So his day was spent. One year followed close in the track of another, and he grew old without noticing it.

Then there came at last a gloomy evening. It was wet and cold, and now and then there came a shower. The old dog had been all day on an expedition down in the city. He walked slowly along the street, limping a little; a couple of times he stood still and shook his black hide, which with the years had become sprinkled with gray about the head and neck. According to his wont he walked and sniffed, now to right, now to left. He took an excursion in at a gateway, and when he

came out had another dog in his company. Next moment came a third. They were young and sportive dogs that wanted to entice him to play, but he was in a bad humor, and furthermore it began to sleet. Then a whistle pierced the air, a long and sharp whistle. The old dog looked at both the young ones, but they paid no attention; it was not one of their masters that whistled. Then the old masterless dog pricked up his ears; he felt all at once so strange. There was a fresh whistle, and the old dog sprang irresolutely first to one side, then to the other. It was his master that whistled, and he surely had to follow! For the third time someone whistled, sharply and persistently as before. Where is he then, in what direction? How could I have been separated from my master? And when did it happen, yesterday or day before yesterday, or perhaps only a little while ago? And what did my master look like, and what sort of smell had he, and where is he, where is he? He sprang about and sniffed at all the passers-by, but none of them was his master, and none wanted to be. Then he turned and bounded along the street; at the corner he stood still and looked around in all directions. His master was not there. Then he went back down the street at a gallop; the mud spattered about him and the rain dripped from his fur. He stood at all the corners, but nowhere was his master.

Then he sat down on his haunches at a street crossing, stretched his shaggy head toward heaven, and howled.

Have you ever seen, have you ever heard such a forgotten, masterless dog, when he stretches his neck toward heaven and howls, howls? The other dogs slink softly away with their tails between their legs; for they cannot comfort him and they cannot help him.

STORIES BY
SIGFRID SIWERTZ

THE LADY IN WHITE

THE little town slept in the noonday sunlight. Even the flowers leaned slumberously against the lowered blinds of the open windows. Not a human being remained in the courthouse square. Down at the harbor it was equally quiet. A little beyond the big bridge lay a lumber barge with limp sail. It seemed that it would be hours before she could get in.

From a dressing room of the bath-house came a middle-aged man of rather spare figure, with a very white and delicate skin. He carefully hung his eye-glasses on a nail, sat down on the sunny side of a bench, blinked at the light and smiled to himself.

With that there emerged into the vista toward the bay a veritable walrus head; a coarse, hairy body shone through the green shimmering water; and with several sharp, panting strokes the giant plunged forward to the stairway, climbed up, and threw himself blinking upon the hot bridge of the bath-house.

The small white-skinned man surveyed anxiously but with interest the face of the other;

the eagle nose, the bushy eyebrows, and the bristly drooping mustache.

Where the deuce had he seen that face before?

Thereupon the walrus suddenly got up and stretched out his flipper.

"Why, devil's in it if that isn't little Modin!"

"Yes, I surely thought it was someone I knew. Good-day, Brother Axelson! Lord! but it's hard to recognize folks out of their clothes."

"Aye, your own dog barks at you when you're naked. I'm scared to death of myself when I look at myself in a glass."—Axelson surveyed his new-found acquaintance with the critical look of a doctor.—"You seem to be in good condition, Modin. Aren't you going to plunge in?"

"No, thanks; I'm just enjoying a sun bath. I love to sit here like this and take in the special bath-house smell of water and sun-steeped wood. It has a holiday scent, don't you think?—Well, do you know, I hadn't a notion it was in this town you were a doctor. That's how folks lose sight of each other."

"Aye, I've stuck it out here these seventeen years now, you faithless little devil.—And you've taken over your father's big antiquarian book business."

"Oh, you know everything of course. The same horse's memory as ever. I taught a while,

but that didn't suit me at all. And so when my father died"——

"Your catalog is always prized by connoisseurs."

"The first assistant, old Salin, deserves the credit of that. He's a faithful martinet. It's really the etchings and engravings that interest me. There's certainly a bad feeling among our regular customers because I can't let the finest things go away from me. I'm here to look at the collection of the deceased banker. I was here once fifteen years ago, while I was still a teacher. I didn't suspect then either that you were in the neighborhood. That visit is connected with an exquisite memory, a fleeting yet pervasive experience, which I can only compare with the fragrance of certain delicate perfumes."

"You're very keen about perfumes, my dear Modin; I remember that from of old. Is it because the sense of smell is the weakest of the senses?"

Modin made the gesture of pushing up his absent spectacles.

"The weakest? On the contrary, smell is an extraordinarily fine sense. We can distinguish the smallest nuances with it. The truth of the matter is simply this, that we have only fixed a few of these nuances in words."

"True. But at any rate smell belongs to those senses which have least to do with our thought."

"It has infinitely much to do with all that lies above or below our comprehension. It is in the highest degree a poetic sense, and I am sorry for anyone who has a weak power of smell."

Axelson turned over with a grunt so as to be burnt evenly all over.

"Well, my dear Modin, now for your experience! This isn't ordinarily a town for great experiences."

"Very good. I came here by accident on a vacation trip. The ticket was good for a longer journey, but the train stopped, it looked pretty, and I got off. I left my knapsack at the hotel of Comfort and betook myself to strolling along the select avenues of Peace."

"Hm! Traveling is nothing but trying to get away from yourself with lies."

Modin seemed not to hear. He looked down into the water, which tossed up a thousand splinters of sunlight.

"It was a royal day in June: lofty blue heavens, a light breeze, transfiguration in the air. The gardens blossomed within their red palings and the daws cried merrily around the high church steeple. It was a day when one suddenly stands still in the blue shade, looks over the crosses in

the churchyard grass, and finds that even death is gentle."

"Hm, hm!"

"Well, so I ate a light dinner and adventured out along the road into the wide land of summer leafage. I have never in my life seen so much white bloom: hedge, sloe, apple, pear, cherry. I recall too a linden avenue—the gravel was quite yellow with the rain of blossoms—and the branches murmured solemnly."

Axelson twisted himself over on his back again.

"Excuse me, my dear brother, but did you meet anything?"

"Everything and nothing, old friend. Without meeting a living soul I had got out into a landscape of billowy grain fields and meadows with islets of splendid old oaks. I walked along a blossoming ditch side and sat down on a mossy stone close to a fence that ran around one of the knolls of oak. It began to draw on a bit towards evening. The light had not yet the garish colors of sunset; it was merely a thought more golden than before. And in the low, warm light the green of the fields took on a full-toned richness, a vehement intensity, which I shall never forget. One speaks more often of an intense blue, but green too can take on such a tone toward evening.

"I don't know how long I had sat absorbed in

all this, when for some reason or other I turned around and on the other side of the half-dilapidated fence discovered a young lady dressed in white who was sitting on the same slope with me. She had let the book she had been reading sink down on her knees and was gazing similarly out into the wondrous living sea of color.

"At first I was almost taken aback at not being absolutely alone with my emotion, which was so overpowering. But I soon came to myself. Very good, thought I, at any rate there are at this moment no more than two persons in the world, she and I. And—can you imagine it?—I, who am ordinarily so shy and embarrassed in ladies' society, began a conversation: 'Here we are sitting, we two, as *staffage* for the loveliest picture in the world.' Words glided off my tongue of themselves with a sort of gentle irresistibility which I have never felt before or since. Perhaps my words fitted in in some way with what she had just read in her book. She nodded with a slight smile: 'Yes, it's wonderfully lovely.' I leaned against the fence. 'How insignificant is all that *happens* in life compared to such a moment of afternoon as this?' I said. 'Even fate seems old and dusty, dusty with stage dust.'

"This was the introduction to a long conversation, at the beginning very lively—a conversation about everything and nothing, of various colors,

of flowers and perfumes, of the flight of the swallows that wheeled above our heads."

Axelson pricked up his ears.

"Swallows," he muttered; "then there was a barn or a dwelling-house in the neighborhood."

But Modin meanwhile heard only his own voice.

"Gradually the evening grew utterly quiet. I can still hear the soft incessant rustling among the dry leaves heaped up in the ditch, a rustling that told of minute unknown lives. And I can still see her white skirt against the green hillside. Behind her the thick blossoms of the hawthorn shone mysteriously under black, dead branches in the green half-darkness of the oak wood. It was in truth a wood for the imagination, a Shakespeare's Forest of Arden. And the young woman I talked with was Rosalind. I told her so, and she seemed to appreciate it.

"Gradually our conversation grew more serious. We spoke of special, intimate, personal memories and of our common interests in life. We weighed life and death with swift, light sensitive words. What we said was simple, frank, stamped with the most eager and honest wish to give a living impression of our true character. It was a genuine contact of soul with soul.

"Well, then the shadows of the trees on the field began to grow long and contemplative, so

we said good-bye. She picked up her book and gave me her hand across the fence, for I had kept on standing on the other side. 'Thanks and good evening,' she murmured, 'thanks and farewell.' With that she was gone into the woods. As for me, I went home to the hotel and lay down in my clothes with my hands under my head, and there I lay awake all night. That was the loveliest night of my life, I may tell you. I felt myself marvelously cleansed and exalted, lonely and yet not alone.—Next day I went on where my ticket was made out for. And that was the whole thing."

Axelson smiled:

"That wasn't so terribly much."

"It was much to me, my dear friend. You have, to be sure, a more robust appetite."

"But why the devil did you go on? Why didn't you go back to your Forest of Arden?"

Modin blinked at the sun with a smile of quiet fanaticism:

"I am no fool."

"But it might have been something for your whole life."

"As it is it's something for my whole life, though of course you can't understand it. I dare affirm that never has a meeting of two persons been so unconstrained, so deep and free. People

talk of intuitive thought, but here was an intuitive companionship without selfish purpose or social barrier. Never a second time would such a flood of clear and radiant ideas have surged through my consciousness. I tell you, the most involved concatenation arranged itself automatically with lightning speed like nodal figures at the stroke of the bow. And the memory of our communion remains always equally fresh and pure just because I did not wear it stale with further acquaintance. I don't lie when I say that I have lived in a sort of spiritual wedlock with that unknown woman. Who can prove that the long years give more than one exquisite hour? Humanity is so brittle and changeful that a long life together must always be precarious. I have no idea whether she was married or became married later. But it may very well be that I know that woman better than her husband does. Strong impressions wear away. People can't be true to each other over a long period. For truth the great requisite is freshness, immediateness. Truth must always be new, according to my philosophy. Habit is truth's worst enemy. How then can a lifelong marriage be true?"

Axelson raised his eyebrows:

"Wait a bit. I must strike in and put a few questions before I get angry. For instance, it

would be nice to hear a closer description of this lady with whom you have lived in such a remarkable wedlock."

"Very good, I can answer you, since I'm fully armed against all sarcasms. She was a woman of an altogether unusual feminine spirit. In her archness there was a delicate acknowledgment of her womanly limitations. And he who knows his bounds is already beyond them. She had, perhaps, no thoughts that were actually her own, but she had a quick, gentle receptivity which gave one the pleasant feeling that everything fell upon good ground and bore fruit a hundredfold. I begot thoughts and dreams upon her and enjoyed a sort of intellectual fertilization."

"But may I permit myself to doubt whether this glorified bridal mood really made such a permanent impression on the other person?"

"What right have you to do that?"

"Oh, one might suppose it was only for a moment that she reverted to the usual flighty sentimentality which lies like a broken husk around a woman's realism. The realism is genuine because it is rooted in suffering and the hard limitations of nature. No, woman is not what the bachelor thinks, not what either the ethereal or the crude bachelors think. It may well be that her instinct was whispering all the time in the

depths: Look out for this man, because he is in reality a damned little egoist."

Modin did not seem to be impressed.

"That's just like you, Axelson," he muttered. "You were in the landscape then, too. You were the corncrake. Just a harsh, obstinate noise."

Axelson grew all the more contentious. He strode back and forth over the hot bridge, unconsciously holding his fists where his trousers pockets should have been. At last he halted in front of Modin:

"My dear brother, we have come into a condition of moral nakedness. Permit me to be wholly frank. It looks from your body as if you had never tried a tussle with life. I take back the term bachelor, for, with your pardon, there is more of the old maid about you. Yes, don't be angry. But, you see, you keep irritating me damnably with your misuse of the word marriage. For me marriage is a deep word, deeper even than the word love. Marriage is something big, hard; even rough, if you like. It is brimmed with sweetness and suffering and bitter necessity as inescapable as the fact that you as a little delicate creature have lain crumpled up in your tortured mother's body. One may say in a certain manner that a fleeting, loose relation is purer and finer than marriage, but that is a desertion from

reality, an unorganic arabesque, a petty splendor. Marriage is an heroic word. Yes, because man and woman must inflict heavy suffering upon each other. Sex, which frets them both, must at certain times be felt as a curse. Between even the best and most sober couples there are times of despair and hate. There is a disease of hatred which is inborn in man. But still it is great to endure together. And an honest and deep despair is something quite different from a little cold and limp aversion without marrow in its bones. Everything that's honest, everything that doesn't falsify the fundamentals of life, has a worth, let it look as devilish bitter as it may."

Modin looked away, troubled by the other's confidence.

"My dear friend, I haven't desired to hear all this. From your experience you will hardly succeed in making an apology for marriage."

Axelson gave a jump.

"On the contrary, you little idiot, my marriage is an uncommonly good one. We have five children and are inseparable till death. I tell you this: Cut out woman from your life and you are only half a man! But that's enough of this. I'm now—deuce take it!—roasted through. Shall we get dressed?"

"All right."

Axelson dove into his cabin. But he had

scarcely got on his shirt and trousers before he came rushing into Modin's compartment.

"Listen! Excuse a question. You were telling about an avenue of lindens and a grove of oaks. Do you happen to remember anything more definite about the road out?"

"I don't know of what use all this is. For the matter of that I remember less about localities than of my own feelings."

"Come, try now, or I'll think you are tricking me."

"I've a notion that I passed over a little bridge and under a high red shaky gable, that somehow made me think of Almkvist's story, *The Mill.* That was surely just before my digression."

Axelson's eyes gleamed.

"My good fellow, you must have taken a remarkable circuit, because the mill lies just two and a half minutes' journey outside the town. Do you by any chance remember a giant oak almost dead, which stood down on the slope away from the others?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Good, good! Then I may tell you that about a hundred yards from the place of your meeting stood a dwelling-house, though you could not see it; an ordinary, white-plastered, fire-insured, fairly well mortgaged, decent two-story house with young folks and servants and a croquet

ground. So the wonderful loneliness didn't amount to much."

Modin carefully tied his necktie.

"You're making a fantastically vain attempt to rob me of my illusions."

"Just one more question: Do you remember something special in the white lady's appearance?"

"By something special you mean of course a blemish. Yes, I was really fascinated by a little scar she had on her forehead. It was a very decorative scar, because it drew up one eyebrow a trifle and at first glance gave her a lively and somewhat mocking appearance."

Axelson's whole countenance glowed.

"Splendid, splendid! I sewed that scar together. I know as much as you like of the lady in question. The doctor is the whole town's father confessor."

Modin made a gesture of refusal with both hands.

"I wish to know absolutely nothing, I beg you, nothing!"

But Axelson was merciless.

"This much you must know at any rate, that she got the scar when she fell off a bicycle. And that she lived with her parents in the white-plastered two-story house. And that she worked at the post office from nine to one. And further-

more that she had probably just been betrothed in that very dress. You see that I know my community."

"But all this is most uninteresting, my dear Axelson."

"Not altogether, my dear brother, not altogether."

Axelson dived back into his cabin.

The two men were soon ready. Despite the summer heat Modin was attired in black, and very jauntily; Axelson on the other hand wore a gray check suit. The walrus looked very masterful and imposing when he was dressed. One understood directly that he amounted to something in his community. He stood forth on the quay and slapped the other man on the shoulder.

"Hope you'll do me the honor of eating dinner with me."

Modin as a matter of fact was much disinclined but did not see how he could refuse. Axelson lived a little way out of the town. They passed through an avenue of lindens. The doctor from time to time ogled his friend sidewise. Modin walked slowly and often looked about him. He seemed irresolute. They passed a bridge and the high red gable of a mill. They branched off on a somewhat narrower by-road by the side of the pond. They rounded a hillside with oaks and soon stood before a fruit orchard,

behind which rose a white-plastered two-story house. Axelson hastened to open a gate at the gable end.

"Be so good as to come in, my dear brother."

Modin hesitated, paled and grew faint, but Axelson took him by the arm and drew him hastily along.

Up on the veranda stood a robust lady of middle age, and on the lawn played several bare-legged boys.

Modin just saved himself from falling on the steps. He looked toward the edge of the woods with a helpless glance. But his host introduced him with a grim quiver of the mustache.

"Doctor Amadeus Modin—my wife."

With that Axelson's commanding voice rang out across the lawn, "Come children, aren't you going to say how-do-you-do to uncle?"

The five boys came forward and bowed in turn. It was agony to Modin. He sank down on a sofa and cast an anxious sidelong glance over their close-cropped heads at the lady of the house. She was still dressed in white, and the scar over her eyebrow was still visible. It became her as well as ever, though in a different way. Her figure was full but firm. She had in her something of the matron, in the proud Roman significance of the word. They were a seasoned and vigorous couple, she and her husband. A noticeably stern

matrimonial resemblance had arisen between these two persons, whom it never would have occurred to him to associate with each other. Their mouths had the same expression of sharp humor. Two veterans who had fought their battles side by side, they might have been marching along together for many years.

All of this passed like lightning through poor Modin's brain. He no longer believed actually that he knew more about the lady in white than did her husband.

Axelson was on the watch when his wife went in to arrange about dinner and pounced on his guest.

"Beware of white ladies, dear brother. So far it seems that she doesn't recognize you. But at dinner I may perhaps make her memory clearer. It's uncanny when the dead come to life, eh?"

And with that if the brutal dog didn't go on to hum:

> "Look out, my boy, look out, look out!
> 'Tis the White Lady beyond a doubt."

He then hurried in for a moment after his wife, presumably to order the wine. But Modin used the moment. He had no wish whatever to be recognized by the bride of his dreams. On the contrary he seized his hat, bounded away over cucumber frames and strawberry patches, and swift as the timid doe threw himself among the sheltering trees of the wood.

LEONARD AND THE FISHERMAN

AFTER a dinner consisting of an anchovy and four cold potatoes Leonard, a needy artist in wood-cuts, wandered about aimlessly through the city. It was a May day of the grand and dangerous sort. Over the heavens voyaged festal white clouds of giant size, bulging with undefined expectations. And the cool, prickly wind whistled with seductive mockery of all that lay behind the horizon: explorations, adventures, visions of beauty. It was a day of lightness and oppression; of futile longing for action; of cold, far-reaching perfidy; and deep, exhausting unrest. How can the breast expand to bursting and at the same time feel so horribly empty? thought Leonard. Spring is the time when we not only make solemn confession but are merged into a new vital existence; whence, then, in the name of all the devils, is this emptiness, this lack in the midst of plenty, this criminal tendency to put all the glory behind one as quickly as possible?

Brooding painfully over these things, Leonard reeled about half blind and with aching eyes through Gustavus Adolphus Place. Finally he

succeeded in making a resolution: to go down to the River Terrace and see whether the apple trees had begun to blossom yet.

It proved that they had not gone beyond the budding stage.

Leonard then dragged himself up to the railing and stood there a long while under the branches of a large poplar, watching the North-stream tumble its waters between the piers.

There is a certain immobility in the midst of motion in rushing water. The same foaming, roaring wave stays there hour after hour, year after year, indicating a stone in the uneven bed of the torrent. Leonard sought to calm himself with philosophizing over this wave. So does life go on through its forms, he thought. Yonder fettered wave corresponds to the ripple of a flower petal, the curve of a chin. Then some spring day, maybe, the stone is undermined, an unknown obstruction in the furrow of the stream of life is cleared away, and the wave is transformed, the flower petal changes, the curve of the chin becomes different and softer.

Leonard was not the first man who had philosophized above the running stream. But he found no rest thereby. His thoughts merely played on the surface; they served only to sharpen his feeling of uncertainty. The fettered wave irritated him with its feeble trembling, its

futile tossing. The continuous roar was like an indefinite warning, a dark threat. A warning of what? A threat of what? Ah, thou wonderful month of May!

Leonard clenched his empty fists and sank down on a bench in complete despair.

With that his eye fell on a little old man of the fisher trade. He was smoking in great repose a short pipe, muttering to himself, and picking at his clasp-knife, which he had taken apart and hung on the railing to dry. Leonard observed him a long time with secret envy. In winter it's all very fine to be young, he thought, but in spring a man ought to be as old as possible—or at least to have rheumatism that lets up in fair weather. He got up laboriously and pushed his way to the fisherman.

"What have you to say to a day like this?" he grumbled.

"Eh, well, just that I think there are bream under the bridge piers today," the old man said reflectively and puffed out a little blue cloud.

Leonard was struck by the answer. He began a long conversation with the fisherman, whose name was Lundstrom. The best fishing was spring and autumn, he learned. It was mostly smelt and bream. Perhaps a perch now and again. And before Christmas everybody got a burbot or two in eel-pots a little further up the Malar.

He doesn't make any too much, thought Leonard. But he doesn't talk about his fishing in the surly tone that poor men mostly use in growling about their scanty earnings. He is proud of his catches, he fondles his tackle, and his eyes rest confidently and patiently on the water. I gather from that that he is a true fisherman, which a man isn't very likely to become unless he has left much behind him.

This quiet fisher person had a strange and enigmatical charm for Leonard. The old man had pulled together the large iron rings, and already the dip-net was swinging festively at its gallows on his low green-painted craft. There was only the grapnel to be pulled in. Thereupon Leonard reached over the railing and pled touchingly to be taken along for once.

Yes, that would be all right enough.

The boat was first hauled along the stone quay to the bridge and then out with the stem set straight into the roaring whirlpool. A few quick, well-directed oar-strokes, and they floated calmly in the back eddy from the nearest pier of the bridge with the foaming surge to right and left and the dusky arches of the bridge ringing and singing over their heads. There was a dizziness in the suction between the bridge piers, a sensation of rapid movement and yet of rest.

Lundstrom made fast to a ring and sat down

at the crank by means of which he lowered and raised his net.

"Now the job is to sink the net straight down," he said; "and to do that one must manage so that it is half taken by the current and half by the back eddy. Perhaps the gentleman will give a pull at the oars. There, bring her in a little and it'll be fine!"

Leonard brought the boat in and the net descended solemnly.

The old man sank into meditation for a while, and this was a good time to study him. He was by no means ill to look at.

Why should the upper classes be condemned to appear correct and banal? Why should fine folk go about as a monstrosity to every practised and sensitive eye? Look at Lundstrom's jacket here! The sun and rain of all seasons has given it the most delicate shade of green. His hat with its admirable patina might be of bronze. And his trousers!—what a combination of characteristic wrinkles, telling of age, experience and strife well sustained. What a treasure for an artist in wood-cuts! Lundstrom's custom had grown as one with him. It was no wretched accident. Is there anything more agonizing than a tired, grumpy scarecrow that peers out of a brand new summer suit, glittering with naïve optimism? Or red-cheeked, pious rusticity sewed up in cautiously

gray, pessimistic duds from a distant, smoky, rain-dripping, overcrowded factory district? But out of Lundstrom's worn collar grew a face covered with moss-gray stubble over a network of friendly wrinkles and furrows. And out of the stubble shot up a two-story nose with room for many a pinch of reflective snuff. Large noses may be either volcanic or placid. Lundstrom's was placid. It separated genially but firmly two small gray, liquidly bright eyes, which never seemed to have fastened on anything that burned too hot, never to have stared at anything helplessly, never to have wavered anxiously about over empty, exhausting horizons.

Lucky man, sighed Leonard. He sits peacefully under the voyaging clouds, in the midst of the Northstream swollen with spring freshets he sits peacefully at his crank. He is on the far side of indefinite expectations and adventure and drifting about in the inane. He has happily left his future behind him.

"But for heaven's sake it must surely be time for you to haul up."

"No hurry, no hurry," opined Lundstrom, who nevertheless began gently to turn the crank. The net came up with a good sediment of silver-white splashing smelts.

With a quiet pursing of the lips the old man emptied his cargo into the fish-well.

Next time there was a bream, a plump rascal.

Beyond the bridge railing and the stone barrier over by Gustavus Adolphus Place it was already black with people. A little boy in a blue embroidered blouse tried very cleverly to spit on Leonard's hat. But Leonard began to find the folk up there altogether ephemeral, them and the whole muddle of palace, Parliament House, churches, theatres, prisons and banks which chance had collected along the river; the river which had run when there were only a few islands here inhabited by fishermen, and which would continue to run when all the splendor was dust again.

But Lundstrom, who grew cheerful with his good luck, began little by little to express his opinion about one thing and another. It may as well be said first as last that he regarded with slightly ironic disapproval a good deal of the bustle up there in the city. Ministerial crises, election campaigns, debates, law-suits, theatre intrigues, and things of that sort struck him as mere nonsense.

"Folks babble and gad about so they get tired and cross," he said. "They ought to fish a little more than they do. All the ministers ought to come down here and pull the net a couple of times a week. And the party leaders and the soloists and the other star actors as well. That would make them really good. And if there wasn't

room for them all here, let the government hire a big boat and carry them all out to the coast. It's right astonishing how folks can work things out when they are together in a boat. And likewise how it can thaw one's head to sit and look at a dipsy. I don't know how it is, but there's surely something specially particular about water.

"Yes, I need only think about myself," continued Lundstrom. "How should I have ever got straight without this here boat and net? It doesn't help how quiet a man is; he gets stage fright sometimes just the same, in my opinion. First night is first night, and that's just how it feels in the pit of the stomach many weeks ahead. The gentleman may imagine that it's a job to turn a wild and desolate wood into a fine castle hall with roof chandeliers and a marble floor and pillars and pictures and chairs. And all that must be done in less time than the gentleman needs to empty a glass of punch. It was specially hard with that fellow Shakespeare, who was hard on account of all his scenes. Imagine if a piece of cliff scenery should come dancing down into the middle of a little petite French boudoir, as they call it. That would look fine! Aye, if a man went off and worried over all the misfortunes that could happen, it was a good thing to have fishing to turn to. Down here it was as if all a man's

troubles ran off him. Lord! a man would think, it isn't the only thing in life if a piece of building should go wrong up in that play-box there. Yes, I've been in the theatre line over fifty years, I have. So a man has his memories. 'A Traveling Troupe' was a crazy piece, for there a man had to turn the wings hindside front, as the gentleman should know, so that only the gray cloth could be seen from the hall. I believe I know all the fine lines by heart from that day to this, and Hamlet too at a pinch. One time Yorick's skull was to have been brought out. The public got impatient and began to cough and stamp. But we couldn't raise the curtain for the church-yard scene, because Hamlet had to have the skull to make his speech about. There was the skull of a man who had killed his wife and child and one and a half bailiffs; we had got the loan of it from the Charles Institute. We hunted and hunted. At last I came upon the skull in a trunk. The actor who was playing Hamlet was so glad that he promised to give me a supper at Stromsholm. He kept his word, too: steak and vegetables and fizzy pearls. Afterwards it came out that somebody had hid the skull on purpose. It was somebody who wanted to have the rôle and was nearly bursting with jealousy. He certainly needed to get out and fish a little, eh?

"Well, that was Hamlet. Afterwards I went

over to the opera. I didn't regret it; music suited me better. That comes about as a man gets older, you see. A man gets tired of the many words. But with music one can think anything at all. I was with the opera upwards of twenty years, up to last Christmas—Aye, aye, a man gets old. . . .Well, so now I get to amuse myself with the boat here and tramping for the organ at Jacob's Church. Yes, that affair of the organ tramping is a special particular story which we shan't talk over now," said Lundstrom, who seemed to touch with some shyness his transition to the churchly vocation.

Hereupon the old man again grasped his crank, and up came another splendid batch of fat breams. With friendly, approving comment he let them vanish into the well.

Look here, today is turning out better than I supposed, thought Leonard, who could hardly keep from rubbing his hands. My life and trade seem really prosperous from the frog's-eye view of this old fisherman.

But Lundstrom cast a knowing, sidelong look at him.

"No, I steal up into the theatre garret sometimes and hear a little of this world's music yet, as old as I am. Though it doesn't give me sleepless nights any more, you see. A man sleeps well when he has a big organ to turn to."

Leonard smiled more broadly and sat quiet, struck by the old man's repose. This contented frog's-eye view of the drama of life spread out into a wider perspective than he had supposed at the start.

The old man pointed to a paper sticking out of the artist's pocket.

"Should you perhaps care to look what they're giving up there tonight? 'Tristan and Isolde.' Indeed! that's a fine thing. Then I'll go up a while. You see I've been with them and set scenes for that opera, so it's an old acquaintance. Well, and so I'll thank you for your help. It's past eight and that will have to be enough of the breams till tonight."

It was in fact drawing on towards evening. Heaven's great voyaging clouds had ceased to move, saturated with the newly-won warmth of the light, and had sunk nearer to earth. In the stealthy silence of the early twilight the roaring of the river grew suddenly stronger, and its whirlpools more suckingly mysterious. It was evident that the spring day had determined to show the last and most dangerous phase of its power.

But Lundstrom cast loose from the ring unconcernedly. His craft was slung some fifty yards down with the surge but glided neatly into the

smooth water under the River Terrace, where it was moored at its usual place.

It did not occur to Leonard to say good-bye. And yet as he went up the granite steps he felt that now he was passing out of the worthy Lundstrom's perspective. Here ashore the fisherman's power of giving certitude was no longer the same.

No, for up on the bridge went Woman. Nothing could save one from her. Ah, this delicate shiver in the air, this trembling in the nerves of the invisible which sent its waves through coat and Sunday paper straight into one's heart! The restlessness of the day had deepened to a livelier and more dangerous poison. That which in the morning was a sick longing for distant horizons—what was it towards evening but the erotic urge?

Under the low rosy clouds too went Woman, she who grows with the shades so as with night to overshadow the world.

A poor artist's situation was again near to desperation.

The enviable Lundstrom was to go in a back way and listen to 'Tristan and Isolde.' Leonard followed him shyly and irresolutely to the stage entrance of the opera house. In his eyes lay a prayer not to be left alone in the midst of the

dreadful spring evening. Lundstrom did not fail to see the young man's helplessness.

"The gentleman may surely come with me," he said. "I'm a good friend of the porter from forty years back. He gets a bream or so now and then. Just come along!"

Leonard passed a gray head which nodded at a rectangular peep-hole. He then went into a long dark corridor, where a squire with brown kilt and broadsword stood joking at a telephone. Next there were some steps, where Leonard continually had to stand and wait for the puffing Lundstrom. All was silent and empty here. They met only a fireman and a scene-shifter in a blue coat, who called Lundstrom "uncle."

Now a warm, dusky odor was perceptible and a muffled buzzing and mumbling, which seemed to come from the very walls. That must be the orchestra, which was tuning up somewhere in the depths. But Lundstrom cautiously pushed up an iron door and they came out on the first gallery of the stage. Down in the great cluttered space below ran workmen arranging the ship's deck for the first act, and some of the chorus men stood in a laughing group waiting to take their places.

Lundstrom cast a searching glance below.

"Look at that!" he muttered with some disapproval; "they have made the tent smaller. In my time it ran out to the fifth plank, mark H."

It was still too noisy and disturbed where they were, so they went up by a narrow ladder to the second gallery. Lundstrom sat down on a mighty stage dragon of lath and plaster which was hoisted up in the back-scene, and Leonard leaned against a great machine with handles, hexagonal cylinders and heavy felt hammers.

"The old stage thunder," whispered Lundstrom. "They have new, better thunder now that goes by electricity."

There was a fantastic play of light and shadow up through the enormously high vault of the stage, which extended over their heads with five more galleries. The electric footlights below threw splintered rays up through the grilled flooring of the galleries, until the gleams were lost in an incredible labyrinth of ropes, weights and pulleys. The whole was like a giant skeleton, a fantastic loom.

This is where they weave dusty lies, thought Leonard, who found the rear view of the drama grotesque and oppressive, so that he almost began to long for the streets again. People must love illusion astoundingly, if it can be made big business to such an extent.

But with this the trickling tones of the orchestra tuning up were suddenly silent, and after a few moments the prelude broke out with a voice of powerful earnestness. A thrill passed through

Leonard's nerves and in a moment he was tense and expectant. Like a living, overwhelming stream of actuality the music burst forth through all the dusty rubbish of illusion.

Now the curtain was raised and the human voices came up, gushed up. There was the sailor's gay song of yearning on his billowy journey to the land of King Mark, Isolde's wildly surging hate and suffering, Tristan's timid, rock-firm defiance of death. So it went on to the magic potion and the helpless, the irresistible love cry which is lost in endless jubilation.

The curtain fell again.

Leonard looked at Lundstrom, wondering what he could possibly fish up from such a stream. The old man seemed tranquil and unmoved, as he sat on the scaly dragon and held in his mouth his unlighted pipe.

"Now they've got to hurry down there," he said, "for now the ship must become a park."

Threads began to move on the giant loom, blocks creaked and giant fabrics gave forth dust. With that the park was there, though it looked very strange from the back, and the curtain solemnly came aloft once more.

The two sat squatting again at the brink of the great music torrent. Heavy, bottomless well of tone—dark purple, restlessly driving waves, which now and then break into foam with a cry:

"O thou spirit's
Highest, maddest
Exquisite burning joy!"

Love rescued from the cold glance of day—night without morning—yearning for death—the world's redemption through passionate ecstasy!

"Quiet our trembling,
Sweetest death,
With yearning awaited,
O love-blent Death!"

And so on to the end—the sinister dawn with the chill spectres of day, the discovery, the crossed blades and Tristan's wound.

Such things are too much for a poor lonely and hungry artist on a lovely evening in May.

"The deuce is in it," he muttered, "the very deuce! Why after that should a poor devil sit and carve in wood?"

But Lundstrom sat with his chin on his hand and gazed out of the distance, paying hardly any attention to Leonard's violent gestures. The old man's shadow was outlined on a blue background, large, vague, as though ready to merge in the dimness of the thousand recesses around it.

Leonard was no longer interested in him, he would have preferred to be alone. Pshaw! the poor old codger hasn't a notion of what is seething down there, he thought. He's just moidering

around with old stage properties. But thereupon Lundstrom lifted his gray head and said something which indicated that he nevertheless could fish memories out of the stream of tone.

"Sometimes when I sit here I get to be with them that lie out in the church-yard," he muttered. "Wife and children and friends. It's as if the music rinsed one out inside. Everything gets clearer and one sees that what's been is still."

"I see only what will never come to pass in life for my part, and that's a cursed lot different," burst out Leonard with greater bitterness than he himself realized. In his heat he was constrained to use strong words. But in reality he felt the beginning of a relaxation and release.

Then came the third act.

Tristan lies in feverish dreams by the shore of the sea. He waits for his Isolde. But when she finally comes, he, in the wild joy of desperation, tears open his unhealed wound and bleeds to death before it is vouchsafed him to kiss her. So, too, it had to be. Passion has overleaped all human bounds. It is a cool, wondrous alleviation that finally his blood may pour forth with the poison of the potion, with all the endless, tempestuous, lamenting, jubilating desire.

They got up softly and pressed out through the glowing dust over mighty craters of tone.

Outside, the spring night was cool. Leonard grew pale and his eyes shone.

"In old times people opened their veins," he muttered, "but this is a much finer way."

He edged hurriedly across Gustavus Adolphus Place and took his stand at the barrier by the river. The moon hung thin as a flower petal up in the greenish-blue heavens, whose color seemed to consist only of coolness and depth. The river rolled along pale mother-of-pearl dust.

Here assuredly some one passed one day in May and was empty and sad and full of fiery moods, thought Leonard. But now he has loved and died with Tristan, so that now he hardly touches the ground, and everything is silent and all the world appears as a cool and lovely memory. Yes, what have I, Leonard the artist in woodcuts, not experienced, seeing that I stand here with the fate of a mighty heart behind me! In this hour I feel love as a great enrapturing memory, something that lives in my soul but is not able to choke my freedom. I have come to drink the potion without its fatal poison. Verily art can give appeasement even to the most burning Now. In art is freedom!

Leonard had almost wholly forgotten his fisherman. But now he noted that the old man stood steadily beside him at the rampart. His

face appeared smaller than before in the moonlight. Despite the two-story nose and the gray stubble it was almost like a child's. But it had always the same stamp of repose. It peered out into the spring night, as if all this illimitable canopy was a friendly home for brisk old folks. Naturally, thought Leonard, the whole world is for him just a beautiful dream of once on a time. The moon, the trees, and the rushing water here, all are his memory, all have flowed into a great certitude, all are his innermost self, as memories are.

Leonard gave the old man his hand:

"Thanks for your help!" he said.

"Aye, thanks and good-bye, then. Now I must down there again a bit, I suppose. Fishing is best at night."

Thereupon Lundstrom went to his net. But Leonard strolled without uncertainty or restlessness up to his den on the crest of South Stockholm. His thoughts played meanwhile with the same daring little speech:

Why should infinity make us homeless? he said to himself. Infinity has its middle point somewhere. Well, and I, woodcut artist Leonard, am sitting in the centre. Should I not then with a good heart cut at my boxwood blocks?

STORIES BY
VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM

WHEN THE BELLS RING

IN southern Småland, just where the stony road to Scania branches into several village paths and a muddy slope leads up to the parish church, there stood a mill, painted red and with the largest wings that anyone had ever seen in all that region. The miller was dead long since. His widow, named Kerstin Bure, a woman who in her childhood had seen happier days and eaten from shining plates of pewter, managed the mill after her own fashion. She never made mention of her birth or of the love-dealings that had enticed her from a well-to-do pastor's home to the narrow tower-room of a miller, where the axle-beam groaned directly over her sleeping-place; but then she did not speak of other things either. The husband had been too poor to possess a cottage of his own and had instead built a chimney straight through the roof of the mill. There year after year, with her sewing in her hand, the wife had silently continued to watch the work of the men. If at any time she was asked for advice, she answered preferably with a nod or a shake of the head, and she seldom went away further than a

stone's throw from the mill. In figure she was tall and slim with delicate hands, and her face under the starched cap, which was always of the same invariable whiteness, reminded one of Mary Magdalen's on the picture at the altar, though it was more yellowed and shrunken. She never took women into her service, and so women in particular accustomed themselves to passing her in silence. They did not rightly know whether she was proud or meek, but most of them thought that she might well be both. When the sexton appeared with his beadsmen and in his best Sunday attire to solicit the hand of this woman, who was already old and gray, she became quite confused and abashed. She blushed to the roots of her hair and merely shook her head.

One morning she found an infant boy on a heap of twigs by the spring, and as no one knew anything about the parents, she took the little one to her with great tenderness.

"Nobody can tell whether there lies in that heart good or evil seed," she said, "but the day may come when I am to try it. You shall be called Johannes, because you are to become devout as an angel of God. I have been sore afflicted, but for you I shall lay by a pretty penny, so that your life-days may sometime counterbalance the heavy ones I have known."

The boy grew up, and when he prepared for

confirmation, he surprised everybody by his pious and godly answers. With his glossy flaxen hair hanging over his shoulders he afterwards sat by his foster-mother on the mill steps in the bright midsummer evenings and read diligently in the books that he had borrowed from the pastor of the congregation. They sat always taciturnly and quietly, but sometimes he pointed out with his finger some line that seemed to him more beautiful than the others and read it softly aloud.

Hay-ricks and meadows were sending out their perfume of harvest and pasture, and so too, though withered, did the clover—or trefoil-blossoms that lay forgotten here and there between the leaves of the book as markers. Even late at night only a single star burned, but that was large and radiant. Everywhere people were awake and talking, and the cottage doors stood open.

Many whispered to one another a dark rumor of how the Swedish army had been beaten at Poltava and that now the Danes were to land and complete the entire overthrow of Sweden.

One Sunday night a rider stopped at the stairs of the mill and asked for lodging.

Johannes looked doubtfully at his foster-mother and asked the stranger whether he would not rather go on up the hill to the provost's place.

"No," he answered, "I want first to see tonight how the people are getting on."

He managed to get his horse into the walled passage under the mill and then settled down quite contentedly among the others to a plate of beer-soup and a loaf of black bread.

He had let his hair and his goat-like beard grow, so that he looked like a common peasant, but sometimes he pulled his mouth toward his ears and talked harshly in the broadest Scanian, and sometimes he squeezed up his eyes and lamented in the most sentimental Smålandish. He kept awake all night continuing his merry discourse. Once he took a piece of charcoal and drew a speaking likeness of Johannes on the wall. A little later he gave Kerstin Bure shrewd advice as to how she should grease the mill-axle. Or he would sing psalms and polka-tunes, to which he himself set the words. In the morning he took from his traveling-sack a suit with bright soldier's buttons. When Johannes and the old woman peeped wonderingly through the shutters to see whither he went, he was already standing in the church square, and there was such a clatter and hubbub among the populace that it echoed for miles.

"That's Mons Bock!" clamored the crowd. "That is our valiant General Stenbock. If we

have him with us, we'll go out and fight for our country, every one of us, father and son, so God help us!"

"Johannes," said Kerstin Bure then to her sixteen-year foster-son, with a hardness in her voice that he had never heard before, "you are meant to keep devoutly to your books and some day wear a pastor's surplice as my sainted father did, but not to lose your blood in worldly feuds. Stick your tinder-box and clasp-knife in your jacket and tie your leather coat at your belt! Go then out into the woods and keep yourself well hid there until we have peace in the land! Before that I do not wish to see you again. Remember that! You hear now how the men shout on the church square, but mayhap their mouths will soon be stopped with black earth."

He did as she bade him and wandered off into the woods by unknown paths. The firs became gradually more bristling and dense, so that for a long distance he had to push through backwards with the leather coat over his face. In the evening he came to a wide fen, and far out at the rim of a black lake lay an island overgrown with alders.

"There I'll build my den," he thought. But the quagmire of the swampy fen which floated over the twofold bottom, and the dark water where

not a glimmer of daylight broke through, sank beneath his feet, until, exhausted and half-asleep, he sat down on a ledge.

A rustling still sounded from the ridges of the wood, but the lake lay quiet, and the little yellow reflections of the fluffy clouds soon stood motionless. In the infinite distance beyond the mist of the fen a goat-bell from time to time struck a few short, unresonant strokes. Two herd-girls blew quaveringly on their cow-horns, and on the forgotten and dilapidated sepulchre-mound in the dip of the valley the glow-worms kindled their lanterns in the grass.

"Are you one of those that have run away from war service?" a voice asked him, and when he looked up, a goat-girl was standing among the juniper bushes, knitting. She appeared to be one or two years older than he, and her leather boots hung on her back.

"That's right enough; but now the fen bars my way, and berries and ferns get to be scant fare after a while."

"It must be you don't know the woods. Nobody suffers want there. Since my ninth year I've spent every summer up here in the wilds with my goats. Trim and cut down a couple of fir saplings and tie them to your feet with withes, and you can go on the quagmire wherever you like. Thatch

your hut with fir bark and make yourself fishing-gear."

She carefully pulled a long basting-thread from her jacket and tied to it a pewter pin, which she had taken from her head-dress and bent into a hook.

"Here you have a hook and line," she said and continued on her way, still knitting.

That night he did not much heed her advice, but when the sun again shone into his eyes, he pulled out his knife.

As soon as he had trimmed himself a couple of skis of the sort she had taught him to make, he betook himself out on the fen to the island. When he stamped on the grass there, the whole island swayed like a soft feather-bed, but he opined that this was good, because if there was moisture in the ground, he would not need to go far to find angleworms. Hardly, too, had he dug under the grass-roots with his fingers, before he found abundance. To be sure, the fishing went badly at the start, but after he had mystically laid two blades of sedge crosswise on the water, it became at once a different affair. As he carried a tinder-box in his jacket, it was an easy matter to broil his savory capture.

Afterwards he began to build his hut with such haste that he did not give himself leisure to sleep

in the bright summer nights. He understood that it might easily tumble in on the swaying ground if he made it too high. Therefore he built instead a low turf-thatched roof-tree, under which he could not stand upright but had to creep. Every morning he fetched from the shore trimmed saplings, twigs, and pieces of fir bark. Finally he built a hearth of stones, where he let the juniper twigs smoulder and glow all night to drive off the midges. During his work he sometimes talked to himself half aloud, pretending that he was bailiff over a whole gang of workmen, and he called the island Wander Isle.

He met the goat-girl quite often. Her name was Lena. She went about with her knitting, feeding her charges on clearings and meadows. She taught him to set nooses and traps. Eventually they met every morning to see whether the fortune of hunting had been favorable to them, and she made him a good friend to all the wild animals.

"Did you see that gorgeous bird?" she asked, pointing to a blue-black black-cock that roused the whole wood with his thunderous wing-beats. "Him I call the Rich Bachelor of Vaxjö, for he asks neither after his home or his relatives, but just sits at the tavern in his fine dress-coat and smoothes his ruffles."

"And just hark now!" she said one night when

an owl hooted in the ravine. "Him I call the Tax Collector, who, when he turns his head in his white collar and rolls his red eyes or snaps his bill, frightens both man and beast. But if it's a question of the little white harmless eggs in his own nest, then you'll see. Then he has a father's heart in the right place."

But about nothing did she know so many traditions as about the cranes.

"Never yet," she said, "have I got to see the long-legged bald-headed cranes when from their mossy retreats they set up their trumpeting and hold their autumn assembly for taking flight. Round their camp they have outposts that sit with a stone in their one uplifted claw, so that it may tumble down and wake them if they fall asleep. But the most wonderful thing is that then if any human being sees the ashen-gray birds go up, he himself begins to flap with his arms and longs to be able to fly with them, so high that the lakes below on the earth are only like little shimmering water-drops."

"I want to see the cranes," answered Johannes.

"Perhaps you may get to see them in the autumn, but then you must first teach yourself a great deal. First, you must be able to stand so quiet that you look like a dry juniper bush, and to bend down so that you look like a stone, and to

lay yourself flat on the ground so that no one can tell you from a pile of rotten twigs."

"All that I shall try to teach myself, but you must never go on my island. It isn't the way you think there. I have a high fireplace and hangings on the walls, and the floor between the rugs is so shining and slippery that you can't walk on it but have to crawl."

The pretty stories he had read in the dean's books ran in his memory, and he wanted to show the girl that he was not inferior to her but could in turn rouse her to wonder and curiosity.

"If you'll let me get a sight of that house, I'll go down to the settlement and fetch you a musketoon with bullets and powder-horn."

"To my island you'll never come."

"If you'll let me get a sight of that house, I'll teach you in five days to feed yourself on ferns and roots and nothing."

"That's why I've come hither. Keep that promise, and you shall see my house, if you can really get there."

With that he fastened the skis on his feet and vanished in the mist on the fen.

"The enemy stands on the shore," he said to his imaginary soldiers on the island, "but they have neither axe nor knife for making skis. We may feel secure, if only we always remain upright and good."

But late in the evening when he was about to lay fresh juniper on the hearth, he saw the goat-girl coming on the fen with the help of twigs and dry branches.

"The enemy thinks to take us by storm," he continued, "but there is a secret which I have long suspected. I shall make the whole Wander Isle sail to sea like a boat."

He pressed a pole against the outermost tussocks of the fen, and the floating island swam swaying further out on the water.

Then he laid himself calmly to sleep by the crackling embers, but when after a while he suddenly opened his eyes, the goat-girl stood straight before him and peeped in under the low roof on which fox-skins lay spread inside out to dry.

She asked him nothing about the high fireplace or the hangings or the slippery floor, but merely said, "A fresh breeze has blown up, so that the island has driven to land on the other shore. But why do you let the dry fox-skins lie on the roof instead of spreading them in here on the ground? And we ought to stick in juniper around the island so that people can't see either us or the hut."

He thought she spoke sensibly and went ashore at once to collect the juniper. When it was already long after midnight, they still worked at the strengthening and beautifying of his island.

They even made of birch-bark and pegs a door which they could set before the entrance, and when they finally shoved the island off from the land again, they anchored it out in the water with two piles.

"Now the drawbridge is raised," said Johannes, "and we must see to providing the new guests with entertainment such as is right."

"The cook-maids and scullery-maids are always so slow," she said and turned the two fish upon the hearth.

The heather droned and the lake splashed so that the island and the sedge and all the closed water-lilies swayed. As soon as mealtime had passed, Johannes lay down at full length nearest the hearth, but Lena, who did not yet feel that she possessed the right of ownership to Wander Isle, huddled together outside at the entrance with one hand as a pillow. She still heard the juniper sputter with heart's delight, and as she fell asleep she counted the small sparks that sailed forth above the chink in the roof like stars through the night air. That was the fifth—that was the sixth—that was the seventh——. So she was put in mind of one of her songs:

> It was on the seventh morn of the week,
> When the prayer-bells rang, I ween,
> That the bitter tears ran a-down her cheek,
> Though her bride-wreath still was green.

Next day she no longer thought of leaving the island, and the third day they began without noticing it to say "our island." Every morning they landed at the rock, and then she went up to the clearing with her goats or followed him to examine nooses and traps. At last she began also to teach him her art of feeding himself for many days on berries and ferns and nothing, and she noticed that he soon won even greater aptitude in this than she had herself. He grew thin and dry as a blown-off branch, and yet his sinews knotted themselves all the harder. But he always remained quiet and taciturn; and when she asked him what weighed on his mind, he went off on his own paths and remained long away.

They no longer knew the names of the days, but on the Sabbath the wind carried the distant sound of the bells far into the wilderness, and then Johannes put on his embroidered leather coat and led her upon the overgrown sepulchre-mound, from which they could see over fen and lake. With her hand in his he spoke then of God's love, which covered the wretchedest crevices with its fairest bounties, and often they knelt in the grass for long periods and prayed that He would likewise sow a few grains of His seed in their souls.

After much conversation, however, Johannes

was always doubly heavy in mind and sought for solitude.

The nights became ever darker, and often when she turned back from her herd she had to light her way with a torch between mountain walls and the roots of overblown trees. The giant firs, heaven high, were like tents, where black hands sprawled out from among the ragged leafage to seize her by the braids; but she felt no fear, she thought only of one thing. Wherever she went and whatever she busied herself with, she only thought that the summer would soon be ended and that no one could know what would then become of Johannes and her.

Then one October morning she was awakened by Johannes.

"Do you remember the cranes you spoke of?" he asked. "Now I can both stand so quiet that I look like a dry juniper bush, and bend down so that I look like a stone, and lie down flat on the ground so that no one can tell me from a pile of rotten twigs. I have taught myself more than that. I can feed myself on berries and roots, and if those are wanting I can starve along on nothing."

She sat up and listened to a far-off noise.

"That is no cranes."

"Then I'll investigate what it is."

He washed himself in the lake, put on his

leather coat as on a Sunday, and pushed her gently aside when she wanted to hold him back.

"Don't go, Johannes!" she begged. "I won't let you go from me without following."

In silence they came ashore with the island at the ledge and went down through the woods toward the settled land to a bare clearing, from which there was a free outlook over the mossy heath and meadows as far as Kerstin Bure's mill and the church.

"Johannes!" she burst out with almost a scream, and seized him tightly by the coat-tails. "Come back with me to our place!"

He answered her meekly: "My conscience has pained me long enough. Do you see down there on the heath the gray creatures with thin legs? And the outposts that you told about are standing there too. It's Mons Bock, who is out again on his recruiting. In that crane-dance I'd like to play myself."

He walked violently away from her, so that the coat-tail was torn off at the cracking seam, and began to run down to the heath between the ferns and charred stumps.

She followed irresolutely after him, but when she saw how he spoke to the outposts and stepped straight into the assembled crowd of armed peasants, she went at a warm pace to get to him.

When she came into the ring, he already stood before Mons Bock and was taking his recruit penny.

"Where have you stuck your knapsack, Smålander?" asked the general.

"I have no knapsack, but I can feed myself for five days on nothing."

Lena pressed forward between him and the general's dark-brown horse.

"He, Johannes here, is no serving-boy, but we have a place of our own up in the woods."

"As to the marriage I should like to see the certificate in black and white," answered Mons Bock, and the hot color rose and fell on her forehead as he spoke.

Then Lena held out in her two hands the torn-off coat-tail and let him see that it fitted to the leather coat.

"I call that a parson's certificate on real sheepskin," he broke out. "The recruit money may therefore be yours, my good young lady, but the boy has clean perjured himself. And now, ye worthy yeomen of Småland, forward in Jesus' name! Drums we have none, but we can still in our poverty stamp with wooden shoes the old Swedish march that it makes me warm at heart to hear."

Staves and wooden shoes banged and clattered on rocks and ledges. Even the riders had wooden

shoes tied fast to their feet, so that they tried in vain to use their stirrups.

When the last farmers had vanished across the heath, Lena went on to the mill. She dared not relate that Johannes had gone along to the war, but only told of how she had met him in the woods, exhibiting the coat-tail, which was carefully inspected and turned over.

"That's the right coat-tail, sure enough," said Kerstin Bure, "and though I don't like to see women in my service, you may as well stay with me till Johannes comes. I really need a pair of strong arms, for I am well on in years and all my men have been bitten with madness and have run off with Stenbock. There is hardly an able-bodied man left in the parish, except the sexton, the idiot!"

After she had said this she spoke no more to Lena of what had passed in the woods and asked nothing about Johannes, but silently continued her occupations, as was her custom. The mill stood with unmoving wings, because there was no meal to grind, and through the long snowy months of winter there was heard in it neither steps nor voices. Beggars who went past on the road supposed it was unoccupied and deserted.

When the spring began to re-appear and white trailing clouds swept across the heavens, there

came one day a boy hot and panting, who ran along the road and to each and all whom he met shouted a single word, until he vanished in the woods on the other side of the heather. Some hours later a rider came at a gallop and shouted in the same manner on all sides until he was gone. The women gathered in crowds on the hill by the church. Sweden, Sweden was saved, and Mons Bock and his goat-boys had beaten the whole enemy's army at the Straits of Öresund!

Kerstin Bure alone asked nobody what had happened but sat every noon on the mill stairs in the glorious sunshine and carded wool with Lena. All at once as they were sitting silent and busy, while the spring freshet purled in ditches and brooks, they heard that the bells were ringing in the neighboring parishes to the south, although it was Wednesday. Expectantly the people ranged themselves along the road on both sides and from the wide-open door of the church advanced the stumbling pastor of the congregation, followed by his chaplains and in full ceremonials.

Once more the well-known march of the wooden shoes clattered on ledges and stones, but now to bag-pipes and shawms. It was the returning army of farmers. There were deep lines of shaggy beards and slashed sheep-skin coats and noble blue eyes. With staves in hand, muskets in

the strap, and wide hats over their flowing hair, the homeward-bound troops marched back from their victory. Far in the van the fiery cross went from church to church as far as the northernmost wooden chapels, where the Lapps tied their reindeer to the steeples, and all the sunny springtime of Sweden was filled with the song of praise that re-echoed from the bells.

Just in front of the hay-wagons with the wounded rode Mons Bock in his gray overcoat with his riding-whip instead of a sword. Calling down blessings upon their saviour, the peasants hailed him with waving aprons and caps, but he turned to his ensigns and shouted that they should sing.

When the voices ceased, Mons Bock went on alone and sang stanza after stanza which he himself had put together.

Kerstin Bure had risen on the mill stairs and looked and looked beneath her lifted hand, but Lena, who had broken her way forward so fearlessly in the thickets of the wilderness, did not dare this time to wait and look about any longer, but stole away and threw herself sobbing among the empty meal-sacks.

Step by step Kerstin Bure withdrew up the stairs until she stood at the very top with her back against the wall of the mill. Then she pressed her hands like opera-glasses to her eyes. In the

last wagon Johannes sat on the hay among the wounded, as merry and quiet as always, but paler and with bandages around his arm and shoulder.

She pressed her hands even harder to her eyes.

"So after all he was what I thought him, though to prove his soul thoroughly I commanded him otherwise. Then, though he is Kerstin Bure's foster-son, he shall still keep for his life long her whom he himself has chosen, even if she is the poorest of goat-girls."

But at the moment she heard how the sexton and his ringer clattered at the trap-doors of the steeple, and the great bell gave forth its first stroke.

She knitted her brow and went into the mill, saying: "I've no meal to grind, but if he lets his bell sound, though he has had no son in the war, my mill shall play, too."

Creaking, the dust-white axle-beam began to move and purr, and while the peasant army marched singing by, the empty mill kept turning its great wings faster and faster.

THE FORTIFIED HOUSE

SURPRISED by the winter cold, the Swedes in crowded confusion had taken up their quarters behind the walls of Hadjash. Soon there was not a house to be found that was not filled with the frost-bitten and the dying. Cries of distress were heard out in the street, and here and there beside the steps lay amputated fingers, feet, and legs. Vehicles stood fastened to each other so tightly packed from the city gate to the market-place that the chilly-pale soldiers who streamed in from all sides had to crawl between the wheels and runners. Fastened in their harness and turned away from the wind, the horses, their loins white with frost, had already stood many days without food. No one took care of them, and several of the drivers sat frozen to death with hands stuck into their sleeves. Some wagons were like oblong boxes or coffins, where from the chink of the flat lid stared out mournful faces, which read in a prayer-book or gazed longingly with feverish delirium at the sheltering houses. A thousand unfortunates, in muffled tones or silently, cried to God for mercy. Under the sheltered side

of the city wall dead soldiers stood in lines, many with red Cossack coats buttoned over their ragged Swedish uniforms and with sheepskins around their naked feet. Wood-doves and sparrows, which were so stiff with frost that they could be caught with the hand, had fallen on the hats and shoulders of the standing corpses and fluttered their wings when the chaplains went by to give a Last Communion in brandy.

Up at the market-place among burnt areas stood an unusually large house, from which could be heard raised voices. A soldier delivered a fagot to an ensign who stood in the doorway, and when the soldier went back into the street, he shrugged his shoulders and said to whomsoever cared to hear him: "It's only the gentlemen quarreling in the chancellery."

The ensign at the door had lately arrived with Lewenhaupt's forces. He carried the fagot into the room and threw it down by the fireplace. The voices within ceased immediately, but as soon as he had closed the door they began with renewed heat.

It was His Excellency Piper who stood in the middle of the floor, his countenance wrinkled and furrowed, with glowing cheeks and trembling nostrils.

"I say that the whole affair is madness," he burst out, "madness, madness!"

Hermelin with his pointed nose was constantly twitching his eyes and his hands, while he sprang back and forth in the room like a tame rat; but Field Marshall Rehnskiöld, who with his handsome, stately figure was standing by the fireplace, only whistled and hummed. If he had not whistled and hummed, the quarrel would have been finished by this time, because for once they were all fully agreed; but the fact that he whistled and hummed instead of being silent or at least speaking, that could be endured no longer. Lewenhaupt at the window took snuff and snapped shut his snuff-box. His pepper-brown eyes protruded from his head, and it looked as if his comical peruke became ever bigger and bigger. If Rehnskiöld had not continued to whistle and hum, he would have controlled himself today as yesterday and on all other occasions, but now wrath rose to his brow.

He shut his snuff-box for the last time and mumbled between his teeth, "I do not desire that His Majesty should understand statesmanship. But can he lead troops? Does he show real insight at a single encounter or attack? Trained and proved old warriors, who never can be replaced, he offers daily for an empty bravado. If our men are to storm a wall, it is considered superfluous that they bind themselves protecting fagots or shields, and therefore they are wretchedly

massacred. To speak freely, my worthy sirs, I can forgive an Upsala student many a boyish freak, but I demand otherwise of a general in the field. Truly it avails not to carry on a campaign under the command of such a master."

"Furthermore," continued Piper, "His Majesty at present incommodes no general with any particularly hard command. At the beginning, when one succeeded in distinguishing himself more than another, it went better; but now His Majesty goes around mediating and reconciling with a foolish smile so that one could go crazy."

He raised his arms in the air with a wrath which had lost all sense and bounds, notwithstanding he was altogether at one with Lewenhaupt. While he was still speaking, he turned about and betook himself impetuously to the inner apartments. The door slammed with such a clatter that Rehnskiöld found himself yet more called upon to whistle and hum. If he only had chosen to say something! But no, he did not. Gyllenkrook, who sat at the table and examined departure-checks, was blazing in the face, and a little withered-looking officer at his side whispered venomously into his ear: "A pair of diamond ear-rings given to Piper's countess might perhaps even yet help Lewenhaupt to new appointments."

If Rehnskiöld had now ceased to whistle and hum, Lewenhaupt would still have been able to

control himself, to take up the roll of papers he carried under his coat and sit down at a corner of the table; but instead, the venerable and at other times taciturn man grew worse and worse. He turned about undecidedly and went toward the entrance door, but there he suddenly stood still, drew himself up and smacked his heels together as if he had been a mere private. Now Rehnskiöld became quiet. The door opened. An icy gust of wind rushed into the room, and the ensign announced with as loud and long-drawn a voice as a sentry who calls his comrades to arms: "Hi-s Majesty!"

The king was no longer the dazzled and wondering half-grown youth of aforetime. Only the boyish figure with the narrow shoulders was the same. His coat was sooty and dirty. The wrinkle around the upward-protruding over-lip had become deeper and a trifle grin-like. On the nose and one cheek he had frostbite, and his eyelids were red-edged and swollen with protracted cold, but around the formerly bald vertex of his head the combed-back hair stood up like a pointed crown.

He held a fur cap in both hands and tried to conceal his embarrassment and diffidence behind a stiff and cold ceremoniousness, while bowing and smiling to each and all of those present.

They bowed again and again still more deeply,

and when he had advanced to the middle of the floor, he stood still and bowed awkwardly toward the sides, though with somewhat more haste, being in appearance wholly occupied with what he was about to say. Thereupon he remained a long while standing quite silent.

Then he went forward to Rehnskiöld and, with a brief inclination, took him by one of his coat-buttons.

"I would beg," he said, "that Your Excellency provide me with two or three men of the common soldiers as escort for a little excursion. I have already two dragoons with me."

"But, Your Majesty! the country is over-run with Cossacks. To ride in here to the city from Your Majesty's quarters with so small an escort was already a feat of daring."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense! Your Excellency will do as I have said. Some one of the generals present, who is at leisure, may also mount and take one of his men."

Lewenhaupt bowed.

The king regarded him a trifle irresolutely without answering, and remained standing after Rehnskiöld hastened out. None of the others in the circle considered it necessary to break the silence or to move.

Only after a very long pause did the king bow

again to everyone separately and go out into the open air.

"Well?" inquired Lewenhaupt and clapped the ensign on the shoulder with the return of his natural kindliness. "The ensign shall go along! This is the first time the ensign has stood eye to eye with His Majesty."

"I had never expected he would be like that."

"He is always like that. He is too kingly to command."

They followed after the king, who clambered over wagons and fallen animals. His motions were agile, never abrupt, but measured and quite slow, so that he never for a moment lost his dignity. When he had finally made his way forward through the throng to the city gate, he mounted to the saddle with his attendants, who were now seven men.

The horses stumbled on the icy street, and some fell, but Lewenhaupt's remonstrances only induced the king not to use his spurs yet more heartlessly. The lackey Hultman had read aloud to him all night or had related sagas, and had at length coaxed him into laughing at the prophecy that, had he not been exalted by God to be a king, he would for his whole life have become an unsociable floor-pacer, who devised much more wonderful verses than those of the late Messenius of Disa on

Bollhus, but especially the mightiest battle stories. He tried to think of Rolf Gotriksson, who ever rode foremost of all his men, but today it did not please him to bound his thoughts within the playroom of a saga. The restlessness which during the last few days had struck its claws into his mind would not let go of its royal prey. At the chancellery he had just seen the heated faces. Ever since the pranks of his boyhood he had been rapt in his own imaginary world of the past. He had sat deaf to the piercing cries of distress along the way, while he became distrustful of each and all who exhibited a more sensitive hearing. Today as at other times he hardly noted that they offered him the best-rested horse and the freshest cake of bread, that in the morning they laid a purse with five hundred ducats in his pocket. He challenged the horseman at the first melee to form a ring about him and offer themselves to death. On the other hand he noticed that the soldiers saluted him with gloomy silence, and misfortunes had made him suspicious even of those nearest to him. The most cautious opposition, the most concealed disapproval, he made a note of without betraying himself, and every word remained and gnawed at his soul. Every hour it seemed to him that he lost an officer on whom he had formerly relied, and his heart became all the colder. His thwarted ambition chafed and bled under the weight of failure,

and he breathed more lightly the farther behind him he left his headquarters.

Suddenly Lewenhaupt came to a stand, debating within himself how to exercise an influence upon the king.

"My heroic Ajax!" said he, and tapped his steaming horse, "you are indeed an old manger-biter, but I have no right to founder you for no good cause, and I myself am beginning to get on in years as you are. But in Jesus' name, lads, let him who can follow the king!"

When he saw the ensign's anxious sidelong look toward the king, he spoke with lowered voice: "Be faithful, boy! His Majesty does not roar out as we others do. He is too kingly to chide or bicker."

The king feigned to notice nothing. More and more wildly over ice and snow he kept up the silent horse-race without goal or purpose. He had now only four attendants. After another hour one of the remaining horses fell with a broken fore-leg, and the rider out of pity shot a bullet through its ear, after which he himself, alone and on foot, went to meet an uncertain fate in the cold.

At last the ensign was the only man who was able to follow the king, and they had now come among bushes and saplings, where they could proceed but at a foot-pace. On the hill above them

rose a gray and sooty house with narrow grated windows, the garden being surrounded by a wall.

At this moment there was a shot.

"How was that?" inquired the king, and looked around.

"The pellet piped nastily when it went by my ear but it only bit the corner of my hat," answered the ensign without the least experience of how he ought to conduct himself before the king. He had a slight Småland accent and laughed contentedly with his whole blonde countenance.

Enchanted by the good fortune of being man by man with him whom he regarded as above all other living human beings, he continued: "Shall we then go up there and take them by the beard?"

The answer pleased the king in the highest degree, and with a leap he stood on the ground.

"We'll tie our steeds here in the bushes," he said exhilaratedly and with bright color on his cheek. "Afterwards let us go up and run through anybody that whistles."

They left the panting horses and, bending forward, climbed up the hill among the bushes. Over the wall looked down several Cossack heads with hanging hair, yellow and grinning as those of beheaded criminals.

"Look!" whispered the king, and smote his hands together. "They're trying to pull shut the rotten gate, the fox-tails!"

His glance, but recently so expressionless, became now flickering and anon open and shining. He drew his broadsword and raised it with both hands above his head. Like a young man's god he stormed in through the half-open door. The ensign, who cut and thrust by his side, was often close to being struck from behind by his weapon. A musket shot blackened the king's right temple. Four men were cut down in the gateway and the fifth of the band fled with a fire-shovel into the garden, pursued by the king.

Then the king wiped off the blood from his sword on the snow, while he laid two ducats in the Cossack's shovel and burst out with rising spirits, "It is no pleasure to fight with these wretches, who never strike back and only run. Come back when you have bought yourself a decent sword."

The Cossack, who understood nothing, stared at the gold-pieces, sneaked along the wall to the gate, and fled. Ever further and further away on the plain he called his roving comrades with a dismal and lamenting "Oohaho! Oohaho!"

The king hummed to himself as if chaffing with an unseen enemy: "Little Cossack man, little Cossack man, go gather up your rascals!"

The walls around the garden were mouldering and black. From the wilderness sounded an endlessly prolonged minor tone as from an æolian harp, and the king inquisitively shouldered in the

door of the dwelling-house. This consisted of a single large and a half-dark room, and before the fireplace lay a heap of blood-stained clothing, which plunderers of corpses had taken from fallen Swedes. The door was thrown shut again by the cross-draught, and the king went to the stable buildings at the side. There was no door there, and a sound was now heard the more plainly. Within in the darkness lay a starved white horse bound to the iron loop of a wagon.

A lifted broadsword would not have checked the king, but the uncertain dusk caused the man of imagination to stand on the threshold, fearful of the dark. Yet he gave no sign of this, but beckoned the ensign. They stepped in down a steep stairway to a cellar. Here there was a spring, and as a stop-cock to the singing wind which stirred the water, a deaf Cossack with whip and reins, and without an idea of danger, was driving a manly figure in the uniform of a Swedish officer.

When they had loosed the rope and had bound the Cossack in the place of the prisoner, they recognized the Holsteiner, Feuerhausen, who had served as major in a regiment of dragoon recruits, but had been cut off by the Cossacks and harnessed as a draught animal for hoisting water.

He fell on his knees and stammered in broken

Swedish: "Your Majesty! I gan't pelief my eyes. . . . My gratitude. . . ."

The king cheerily interrupted his talk and turned to the ensign: "Bring up the two horses to the stable! Three men cannot ride comfortably on two horses, and therefore we shall stay here till a few Cossacks come by, from whom we can take a new horse. Let the gentleman also stand guard at the gate."

After that the king went back to the dwelling-house and shut the door after him. The horses which, desperate with hunger, had been greedily gnawing the bark from the bushes, were meanwhile led up to the stable, and the ensign went on guard.

Slowly the hours went by. When it began to draw towards dusk, the storm increased in bitterness, and in the light of sunset the snow whirled over the desolate snow-plain. Deathly yellow Cossack faces raised themselves spying above the bushes, and long in the blast sounded the roving plunderers' "Oohaho! Oohaho! Oohaho!"

Then Feuerhausen stepped out of the stable, where he had sat between the horses so as not to get frost in his wounds from the ropes with which he had been bound. He went forward to the barred doors of the dwelling-house.

"Your Majesty!" he stammered, "the Cossacks

are gathering more and more, and darkness is coming soon. I and the ensign can both sit on one horse. If we delay here, this night will be Your Mightiest Majesty's last, which Gott in His secret dispensation forbit!"

The king answered from within, "It must be as we said. Three men do not ride comfortably on two horses."

The Holsteiner shook his head and went down to the ensign.

"Such is His Majesty, you damt Swedes. From the stable I heard him walk and walk back and forvart. Sickness and conscience-torture will come. Like a *pater familiæ* the Muscovite czar stands among his subjects. A sugar-baker he sets up as his friend and a little serving-boy he raises on his glorious imperial throne. Detestable are his gestures when he gets drunk, and he treats women *à la françois;* but his first and last word always runs: 'For Russia's good!' King Carolus leafs his lands as smoking ash-heaps and does not possess a single frient, not efen among his nearest. King Carolus is more lonely than the meanest wagon-drifer. He has not once a comrade's knee to weep on. Among nobles and fine ladies and perukes he comes like a spectre out of a thousand-year mausoleum—and spectres mostly go about without company. Is he a man of state? Oh, have mercy! No sense for the public. Is he

a general? Good-bye? No sense for the big masses. Only to make bridges and set up gabions, clap his hands at captured flags and a couple of kettle-drums. No sense for state and army, only for men."

"That may be also a sense," replied the ensign.

He walked vigorously back and forward, for his fingers were already so stiff with cold that he scarcely could hold his drawn blade.

The Holsteiner shifted the ragged coat-collar around his cheeks and went on with muffled voice and eager gestures: "King Carolus laughs with delight when the bridge breaks and men and beasts are miserably drownt. No heart in his breast. To the deuce wit him! King Carolus is such a little Swedish half-genius as wanders out in the worlt and beats the drum and parades and makes a fiasco, and the parterre whistles Whee!"

"And that is just why the Swedes go to death for him," answered the ensign, "that is just why."

"Not angry, my dearest fellow. Your teeth shone so in a laugh when we first met."

"I like to hear the Herr Major talk, but I'm freezing. Will not the major go up and listen at the king's door?"

The Holsteiner went up to the door and listened. When he came back he said, "He only walks and walks, and sighs heavily like a man in anguish of soul. So it always is now, they say.

His Majesty nefer sleeps any more at night. The comedy-actor knows he is not up to his part, and of all life's torments, wounded ambition becomes the bitterest."

"Then it should also be the last for us to jest at. Dare I beg the major to rub my right hand with snow; it is getting numb."

The Holsteiner did as he desired and turned back to the king's door. He struck his forehead with both hands. His gray-sprinkled, bushy mustaches stood straight out, and he mumbled, "Gott, Gott! Soon it will be too dark to retreat."

The ensign called, "Good sir, I should like to ask if you would rub my face with snow. My cheeks are freezing stiff. Of the pain in my foot I will not speak. Ah, I can't bear it."

The Holsteiner filled his hands with snow. "Let me stand guard," he said, "only for an hour."

"No, no. The king has commanded that I stay here at the entrance."

"Och, the king! I know him. I will make him cheerful, talk philosophy, tell of gallant exploits. He is always amused to hear of a lover who climbs adventurously through a window. He often looks at the beautiful side of womankint. That appeals to his imagination, but not to his flesh, for he is without feeling. And he is bashful. If the fair one ever wishes to tread him

under her silken shoe, she must herself attack; but if she pretends to flee, then all the other women must strive against a *liaison.* The most mighty lady his grandmother spoiled everything with her shriek of 'Marriage, marriage!' King Carolus is from top to toe like the Swedish queen Cristina, though he is genuinely masculine. The two should have married each other on the same throne. That would haf been a fine little pair. Oh, pfui, pfui! you Swedes. If a man gallops his horses and lets people and kingdom be massacred, he is still pure-hearted and supreme among all, only his bloot is too slow for amours. Oh, excuse me! I know pure-hearted heroes who were faithfully in love with two, three different maidens or wives in one and the same week."

"Yes, we are so, we are so. But for Christ's pity you must rub my hand again. And excuse my moaning and groaning!"

Just inside the gate, which could not be shut, lay the fallen Cossacks, white as marble with the hoarfrost. The yellow sky became gray, and ever nearer and more manifold in the twilight sounded the wailing cries: "Oohaho! Oohaho! Oohaho!"

Now the king opened his door and came down across the garden.

The pains in his head, from which he was accustomed to suffer, had been increased by his ride in the wind and made his glance heavy. His coun-

tenance bore traces of lonely soul-strife, but as he drew near, his mouth resumed its usual embarrassed smile. His temple was still blackened after the musket-shot.

"It's freshening up," he said, and producing from his coat a loaf of bread, he broke it in three, so that everyone had as large a piece as he did. After that, he lifted off his riding-cape and fastened it himself about the shoulders of the sentinel ensign.

Abashed over his own conduct, he then took the Holsteiner forcibly by the arm and led him up through the garden, while they chewed at their hard bread.

Now if ever, thought the Holsteiner, is the time to win the king's attention with a clever turn of speech and afterwards talk sense with him.

"The accommodation might be better," he began, at the same time biting and chewing. "Ah, good old days! That reminds me of a gallant adventure outside of Dresden."

The king kept on holding him by the arm, and the Holsteiner lowered his voice. The story was lively and salacious, and the king grew inquisitive. The roughest ambiguities always lured out his set smile. He listened with a despairing and half-absent man's need of momentary diversion.

Only when the Holsteiner with cunning deftness began to shift the conversation over to some

words about their immediate danger did the king again become serious.

"Bagatelle, bagatelle!" he replied. "It is nothing at all worth mentioning, except that we must behave ourselves well and sustain our reputation to the last man. If the rascals come on, we will all three place ourselves at the gate and pink them with our swords."

The Holsteiner stroked his forehead and felt around. He began to talk about the stars that were just shining out. He set forth a theory for measuring their distance from the earth. The king now listened to him with a quite different sort of attention. He broke into the question keenly, resourcefully, and with an unwearied desire to think out new, surprising methods in his own way. One assertion gave a hand to another, and soon the conversation dwelt on the universe and the immortality of the soul, to return afresh to the stars. More and more flickered in the heavens, and the king described what he knew about the sun-dial. He stood up his broadsword with its scabbard in the snow and directed the point toward the Polestar, so that next morning they might be able to tell the time.

"The heart of the universe," he said, "must be either the earth or the star that stands over the land of the Swedes. No land must be of more account than the Swedish land."

Outside the wall the Cossacks were calling out, but as soon as the Holsteiner led the talk to their threatened attack, the king was laconic.

"At daybreak we shall betake ourselves back to Hadjash," said he. "Before then we can hardly secure a third horse, so that each of us can ride comfortably in his own saddle."

After he had spoken in that strain he went back into the dwelling-house.

The Holsteiner came down with a vehement stride to the ensign, and pointing at the king's door, he cried out, "Forgif me, ensign. We Germans don't mince words when a wound oozes after a rope, but I lay down my arms and give your lord the victory, because I also could shed my bloot for the man. Do I love him! No-one efer understands him that has not seen him.—But ensign, you cannot stay any longer out in the weather.

The ensign replied, "No cape has warmed me more sweetly than the one I now wear, and I lay all my cares on Christ. But in God's name, major, go back to the door and listen! The king might do himself some harm."

"His Majesty would not fall on his *own* sword but longs for another's."

"Now I hear his steps even down here. They are getting still more violent and restless. He is so lonely. When I saw him in Hadjash bowing

and bowing among the generals, I could only think: How lonely he is!"

"If the little Holsteiner slips away from here alife, he will always remember the steps we heard tonight and always call this refuge Fort Garden."

The ensign nodded his approval and answered, "Go to the stable, major, and seek rest and shelter a while between the horses. And there through the walls you can better hear the king and watch over him."

Thereupon the ensign began to sing with resonant voice:

"O Father, to Thy loving grace . . ."

The Holsteiner went back across the garden into the stable and, his voice quavering with cold, intoned with the other:

"In every time and every place
My poor weak soul would I commend.
Oh, Lord, receive it and defend."

"Oohaho! Oohaho!" answered the Cossacks in the storm, and it was already night.

The Holsteiner squeezed himself in between the two horses and listened till weariness and sleep bowed his head. Only at dawn was he wakened by a clamor. He sprang out into the open air and beheld the king already standing in the garden, looking at the sword that had been set up as a sun-dial.

By the gate the Cossacks had collected, but when they saw the motionless sentry, they shrank back in superstitious fear and thought of the rumors concerning the magic of the Swedish soldiers with blow and shot.

When the Holsteiner had gotten forward to the ensign, he grasped him hard by the arm.

"What now?" he asked, "Brandy?"

At the same instant he let go his grip.

The ensign stood frozen to death with his back again the wall of the gate, his hands on his sword-hilt, and wrapt in the king's cloak.

"Since we are now only two," the king remarked, drawing his weapon out of the snow, "we can at once betake ourselves each to his horse, as it was arranged."

The Holsteiner stared him right in the eyes with re-awakened hate and remained standing, as if he had heard nothing. Finally, however, he led out the horses, but his hands trembled and clenched themselves so that he could hardly draw the saddle-girths.

The Cossacks swung their sabres and pikes, but the sentry stood at his post.

Then the king sprang carelessly into the saddle and set his horse to a gallop. His forehead was clear and his cheeks rosy, and his broadsword glimmered like a sunbeam.

The Holsteiner looked after him. His bitter

expression relaxed, and he murmured between his teeth, while he too mounted to the saddle and with his hand lifted to his hat raced by the sentry: "It is only joy for a hero to see a hero's noble death.—Thanks, comrade!"

THE QUEEN OF THE MARAUDERS

THE tocsin in the church tower at Narva had ceased. In a breach of the battered rampart lay the fallen Swedish heroes, over whose despoiled and naked bodies the Russians stormed into the city with wild cries. Some Cossacks, who had sewed a live cat into the belly of an inn-keeper, were still laughing in a circle around their victim, but the gigantic Peter Alexievitch, the czar, soon burst his way through the midst of the throng on street and courtyard and cut down his own men to check their misdeeds. His right arm up to the shoulder was drenched with the blood of his own subjects. Weary of murder, troop after troop finally assembled in the square and the churchyard. Under the pretext that the churches had been desecrated by the misbelievers who lay buried there, bands of soldiers began to violate and plunder the graves. Stones were pried up from the floor of the church with crowbars, and outside, the graves were opened with shovels. Pillagers broke the copper and tin caskets into pieces and threw dice for the silver handles and plates. The streets, where at the first mêlée the

inhabitants had thrown down fire-brands and tiles, and where the blood of the slain was still swimming in the gutters, were for many days piled up with rusty or half-blackened coffins. The hair on some of the bodies had grown so that it hung out between the boards. Some of the dead lay embalmed and well preserved, though brown and withered, but from most of the coffins yellow skeletons grinned forth from collapsed and mouldered shrouds. People who stole anxiously among them read the coffin-plates in the twilight and now and then recognized the name of a near relative, a mother or a sister. Sometimes they saw the ravagers pull out the decayed remains and throw them into the river. Sometimes, again, protected by night, they themselves succeeded in carrying them off and burying them outside the city. So in the dusk one might encounter an old man or woman who came stealing along toilsomely with children or serving-maids, carrying a coffin.

One night a swarm of pillagers bivouacked in a corner of the churchyard. Hi! what fun it was to pile up a bonfire of bed-slats and bolsters and chairs and coffin-ends and what the devil else could be dragged forth. Flames and sparks blazed up as high as the attic window of the parsonage. Round about stood coffins propped one against another. The bottom of one of the uppermost had been broken, so that the treasurer, of blessed

memory, who was inside it, stood there upright with his spliced wig on his head and looked as if he thought: "I pray you, into what company have I been conducted?"

"Haha! little father," the robbers called to him, as they roasted August apples and onions at the flames; "you always wanted something to wet your whistle, you there!"

The glow of the fire lighted up the living-room of the parsonage and the sparks flew in through the broken panes. In the rooms stood only a broken table and a chair, upon which sat the parson with his head propped on his hands.

"Who knows? Perhaps it might succeed," he mumbled and raised himself as if he had found the key to a long-considered problem.

His silver-white beard spread itself over all his breast, and his hair hung down to his shoulders. In his youth as chaplain he had gone in for a little of everything and he had never pushed back a cup that was offered him. Afterwards as a widower in the parsonage he had worshipped God with joy and mirth and a brimming bowl, and it was bruited about that he did not reach first for his Bible if a well-formed wench happened to be in his company. He therefore even now took misfortune more bravely and resignedly than others, and his heart was as undaunted as his soldierly body was unbowed by years.

He went out into the entry and cautiously pulled out the five or six rusty nails that held down a couple of boards above a little narrow recess under the stairs. Then he lifted the boards aside.

"Come out, my child!" he said.

When no one obeyed him, his voice grew somewhat more severe and he repeated his words: "Come out, Lina! Both the other maids have been bound and carried away. It was verily at the last minute that I got you in here. But it is almost a day since then, and you cannot live without meat and drink. Eh?"

When he was not obeyed, he threw back his head in annoyance, and he now spoke in accents of harsh command: "Why don't you obey? Do you think there is food here? There's not so much as a pinch of salt left in the house. You must be got away, you understand. If it goes ill with you, if a plunderer gets you on the way, I can only say this: clasp your arms about his neck and follow with him on his horse's back wherever it carries you. Many a time in the rough-and-tumble of war have I seen such a love, and then I have slung the soldier's cloak over my priest's frock and waved my hat for a lucky end to the song. Don't you hear, lass? When your late father, who was a drinker—if I must tell the truth—was my stable-boy and pulled me out of a hole in the ice once, I

promised for the future to provide for him and his child. Besides, he was Swedish born as I was. Well, haven't I always been a fatherly master to you, or what has Her Grace to object? Have her wits deserted her, eh?"

Something now began to move in the pitch-black recess. An elbow struck against the wall, there was a rustling and scraping, and with that Lina Andersdotter stepped out in nothing but her chemise, bare legs, and a torn red jacket without sleeves but with a whole back to it, over which hung the braid of her brown hair.

The light of the fire fell in through the window. Squatted together she held her chemise between her knees, but her fresh, downward-bent face with broad, open features was as merry as if she had just stepped out of her settle-bed on a bright winter morning in the light of the dawn.

The blood ran impetuously enough through the veins of the white-haired chaplain, but in that moment he was but master and father.

"I did not know that in my simple house folk had learned such a ceremonious feeling of delicacy," said he, and gave her a friendly pat on the bare shoulders.

She looked up.

"No," she said, "it's only because I'm so wretchedly cold."

"Ah, well, that's natural. That's the way I

like people to talk in my house. But I have no garments to give you. My own hang on me in tatters. The house may burn at any time. I myself can maybe sneak out on my way unaccosted, and I have a Riga riksdollar in my pocket. Who asks about a ragged old man? It's another affair with you, Lina. I know these wild fellows. I know but one way to get you off, but I myself shrink from telling it. Naturally, you are afraid."

"Afraid I'm not. It will go with me as it may. To be sure, I am no better than the others. Only I'm perishing of cold."

"Come here to the door then, but don't be frightened. Do you see out there in the doorway the rascals have set a little wooden casket. It cannot be very heavy, but perhaps you will have room in it. If you dare lay yourself in the casket, perhaps I can smuggle you out of the town."

"That I surely dare."

Her teeth chattered and she trembled, but she straightened herself up a little, let the chemise hang free, and went out on the stones in the doorway.

The pastor lifted off the moist lid, which was loose, and found nothing else in the plundered casket than shavings and a brown blanket.

"That was just what I needed," she shivered. She pulled up the blanket, wrapped it over her,

stepped up, and laid herself on her back in the shavings.

The pastor bent over her, laid both his hands on her shoulder, and looked into her fearless eyes. She might be eighteen or nineteen years old. Her hair was stroked smoothly back to the braid.

As he stood so, it came over him that he had not always looked on her in the past with as pure and fatherly feelings as he himself had wished and as he had pretended to do. But now he did so. His long white hair fell down as far as her cheeks.

"May it go well with you, child! I am old. It matters little whether my life goes on for a while still or is destroyed in the day that now is. I have been in many a piece of mischief and many an ill deed in my time, and for the forgiveness of my sins I will also for once have part in something good."

He nodded and nodded toward her and raised himself.

There outside the clamor sounded louder than ever. He laid on the lid and fastened in the long, crookedly set screws as well as he was able. Then he knelt, knotted a rope crosswise around the casket, and with strong arms lifted the heavy burden on his back. Bending forward and staggering, he strode out into the open air.

"Look there!" shouted one of the pillagers at the fire, but his nearest comrade silenced him with

the word: "Let the poor old man alone! That's only a miserable beggar's casket."

Sweat trickled out over the old man's face, and his back and arms ached and smarted under the severe weight. Step by step he moved forward through the dark streets. Every now and then he had to set down the casket on the ground to take breath, but then he stood with his hands on the lid in constant fear of being challenged and hustled away or of being stabbed by some roving band of soldier revelers. Several times he had to step to one side because of the heavy wagons, loaded with men and women, who were to be taken hundreds of miles into Russia to people the waste regions. The great conquering czar was a sower who did not count the seeds he strewed.

When finally the old war-pastor reached the town gate and the watch came to meet him, he roused his strength to the utmost with all the collected will-power of his anxiety. With a single arm he held the casket in place on his back, while with his free hand he drew the Riga riksdollar from his pocket and handed it to the sentry as a bribe.

The soldier motioned to him to go on.

He wanted again to move his foot forward, but now he was unable. Through the town gate he saw the river glimmer on the open plain, but then it grew dark before his eyes. Still afraid for his

burden in his helplessness, he softly and cautiously lowered the casket beside him on the stone flagging. Thereupon he fell forward and died.

The other men of the watch sprang forward and began to curse and complain. No casket could remain standing there in the door of the gateway.

The officers, who were sitting and gambling in a room of the casemate, now came likewise to the spot. One of them, a little dry, weather-beaten figure with rectangular spectacles, who was more like a clerk than a soldier, took a lantern, came forward and held the lid slightly ajar with his scabbard.

First he drew back his head precipitately, nearly dropping the lantern. The next time he bent down and looked in, he dwelt on the action longer and more searchingly, and afterwards passed his hands over his whole face to hide his thoughts. Then he unhooked his spectacles and stood pondering. When he bent the third time, he sent the light back and forward through the crevice,—and there inside lay Lina Andersdotter quite calmly, screwing up her eyes at him in the lantern's light without herself knowing what was going on.

"I'm hungry," she said.

He laid aside the lantern and went a couple of paces up and down through the door with hands

crossed behind his back. There came then into his frigid expression a sly and merrily vibrating life, and unnoticed he took some August apples and thrust them into the casket. Thereupon he began to give commands.

"Come here, boys! Let eight men take the casket to General Ogilvy, salute him and say that this is a small gift from his humble servant, Ivan Alexievitch. Eight of you others who have just come from working on the walls go after it and roll up your leather aprons like trumpets, in which you are to blow the regimental march. But in front of all two men are to go with rushlights. Forward, march!"

The savage soldiers looked open-mouth at one another and obeyed. Laughing, they lifted the casket on their muskets. Two long stalks, tarred and twisted about with straw, were brought forward from a corner of the gateway and lighted at the lantern; and as the procession set itself in motion into the field toward the camp, the musicians tooted the march in their aprons:

O you, who have chosen a gun to bear,
You care not for lodging or bed, lad,
You feed like a prince on the finest fare,
Of girls and of lice you've enough and to spare,
But when will you ever be paid, lad?

When they came to the camp, the soldiers rushed together around them in the torch-light.

General Ogilvy, who was sitting at table, came out of his tent.

"Beloved little father," said one of the bearers, "Lieutenant Ivan Alexievitch humbly sends you this gift."

Ogilvy grew pale and bit his lips under his bushy gray mustaches. His face, wrinkled and strained to harshness, was at bottom good-natured and friendly.

"Is he out of his right mind?" he thundered with pretended wrath, though in reality he was as frightened as a boy. "Put down the casket and break off the lid!"

The soldiers pried it open with their blades, and the dark lid rattled to one side.

Ogilvy stared. With that he burst out laughing. He guffawed so that he had to sit down on an earthen bench. And the soldiers laughed too. They laughed down through the whole lane of tents, so that they reeled and tottered and had to support themselves one against another like drunkards. Lina Andersdotter lay there in the casket with a half-eaten apple in her hand and made great eyes. She had now become warm again and was as blooming of cheek as a doll.

"By all the saints," Ogilvy burst out. "Not ever in the catacombs of St. Anthony has man seen such a miracle. This is a corpse that ought to be sent to the Czar himself."

"By no means," answered one of his officers. "I sent him two little fair-haired baggages day before yesterday, but he only cares for thin brunettes."

"So it is," answered Ogilvy, and turned himself bending toward Narva. "Salute Ivan Alexievitch and say that, when the casket is returned, there shall lie in the bottom of it a captain's commission. —Hey, sweetheart!"

He went forward and stroked Lina Andersdotter under the chin.

But at that she sat up, took hold of his hair, and gave him a resounding box on the ear, and after that another.

He did not let it affect him in the least, but continued to laugh.

"That's the way I like them," he said, "that's the way I like them. I will make you queen of the marauders, my chick, and as token thereof I give you here a bracelet with a turquoise in the clasp. A band of our worst rabble stole it just now from the casket of Countess Horn in Narva."

He shook the chain from his wrist and she caught it eagerly to her.

When later in the evening the cloth was laid in the tent, Lina Andersdotter sat at the table beside Ogilvy. She had now got French clothes of flowered brocade and wore a head-dress with blonde-lace. But what hands! She managed to

eat with gloves, but under them swelled the big, broad fingers and the red shone between the buttons.

"Hoho! hoho!" shouted the generals. "Those hands make a man merrier than he would get with a whole flask of Hungary. Help! Loosen our belts! Hold us under the arms! It will be the death of us."

Meanwhile she helped herself, munched sweetmeats, and sat with her spoon in the air. If anything tasted bad, she made a face. Eat she could. Drink, on the contrary, she would not but only took a swallow in her mouth and then spurted the wine over the generals. But all their curses and worst expressions she picked up while she sat ever alike blooming and gay.

"Help, help!" shrieked the generals, choked with laughter. "Blow out the light so they can slip her away! Hold our foreheads! Help! Will you have a little puff of a tobacco pipe, mademoiselle?"

"Go to the deuce! Can't I sit in peace!" answered Lina Andersdotter.

There was one thing, though, that Ogilvy skilfully concealed so that the laughers should not turn to him and nudge him in the ribs and pull his coat-tails and say: "Oho, little father, you've got into water too deep for your bald head. Bless

you, little father, bless you and your little mishap!"

He pretended always to treat her with slightly indifferent familiarity, but he never sat so near her that his dog could not jump up between them. He never took hold of her so that anyone saw it, and never either when no one saw it, for then he knew that her hand would catch him on the face so that the glove would split and the red shine out in all its strength. It was enough that, notwithstanding, she now and then gave him a slap in the middle of the face, and no one did she snub worse than him. But at all that he only laughed with the others, so that never before had there been in the camp such a clamor and bedlam.

Sometimes he thought of knouting her, but he was ashamed before the others, because everything could be heard through the tent, and he feared that they then would the more easily guess how things stood and how little he got along with the girl. Wait, he thought, we shall be sitting alone sometime under lock and key. Just wait! Till then things may go on as they do.

"Help, help!" shouted the generals. "That's how she carries her train. We must take hold of it. Lord, lord, no; but just look!"

"Take it up, you," said she. "Take it up, you. That's what you are for."

And so the generals were cuffed and bore her train, both when she came to the table and when she went.

Then it happened one evening when she sat among the drinking old men that an adjutant stepped in, hesitating and embarrassed. He turned to Ogilvy.

"Dare I be frank?"

"Naturally, my lad."

"And whatever I say will be forgiven?"

"By my honor. Only speak out!"

"The czar is on his way out to the camp."

"Very good, he is my gracious lord."

The adjutant pointed at Lina Andersdotter.

"The czar has a fancy for tall brunettes," said Ogilvy.

"Your Excellency, in these last days he has changed his taste."

"God! Call the troops to arms—and forward with the three-horse wagon!"

Now the alarm was struck. Drums rolled, trumpets shattered, weapons clattered, and shouts and trampling filled the night. The drinking party was broken up, and Lina Andersdotter was set in a baggage-wagon.

Beside the peasant who was driving, a soldier sprang up with a lighted lantern, and she heard the peasant softly inquire of him the purpose of the flight.

"The czar," answered the soldier in a monotone and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at the girl.

At that the peasant shrunk together as at a frost-cold breeze and whipped the small, shaggy horses more and more wildly. He hallooed and beat and urged them into a thundering gallop. The lantern-light fell caressingly on the fir bushes and the burnt homesteads; the wagon banged and tottered among the stones, and creaked in its joints.

Lina Andersdotter lay on her back in the hay and looked at the stars. Whither was she carried? What fate awaited her? She wondered and wondered. On her wrist hung the bracelet as a talisman, a pledge for the accomplishing of Ogilvy's wonderful prediction. Queen of the Marauders! It sounded so grand, though at first she had so gradually discovered what the word really betokened. She stroked and plucked at the small silver rings. Then she sat up and scanned the stony road in the lantern's light. Cautiously she moved further and further out. Unnoticed, she climbed slowly over the wagon-sill and lowered her feet to the ground. Would she be crushed and left lying? For a few steps she dragged along. Then she lost her hold, stumbled, and fell lacerated among the bushes.

On thundered the baggage-wagon with its three

galloping horses, and the lantern-light vanished. Then she got up and wiped off the blood from her cheeks while she wandered forth into the trackless woods.

When she met barbarous-looking fugitives and they saw her pretty face, they at once picked berries and mushrooms for her and followed along. She got a whole court of ragamuffins and she treated them so ill that they scarcely dared to touch her dress, but sometimes they stabbed each other. Finally she took service with a skipper's wife, who was to sail with her husband to Danzig. Scarcely had it begun to grow dark when the ragamuffins came out one after another and took service for nothing. The skipper sat on his cabin in the moonlight, blew his shepherd's pipe, and congratulated himself on having got such a willing crew. And never had an old woman seen a stronger serving-maid. But hardly had they put to sea when Lina Andersdotter sat herself beside the skipper with her arms crossed, and all the ragamuffins lay on their backs and sang in tune with the pipe.

"Do you think I'll scour your bunks?" said she.

"Beat her, beat her," cried the old woman, but the skipper only moved nearer and blew and blew on his pipe. Night and day the vessel rocked on the bright waves with slack sail, and the skipper played for Lina Andersdotter, who danced with

her ragamuffins, but down in the cabin sat the old woman crying and lamenting.

When they came to Danzig the skipper stuck the pipe under his arm and slunk off the vessel at night with Lina Andersdotter and her ragamuffins. They guessed now that she thought of going to the Swedish troops in Poland and compelling the king himself to give her his hand.

When she with her followers stepped humming in among the Swedish women of the camp, there was uproar and alarm, because for two days they had sat by their wagons without food. The last provisions had been delivered to the sutlers and divided among the soldiers. Then she stepped forward to the first corporal she happened on and set her hands on her hips.

"Aren't you ashamed," said she, "to let my women starve, when in spite of all you can't get along without them?"

"*Your* women? Who are you?"

She pointed to her bracelet. "I am Lina Andersdotter, the Queen of the Marauders, and now take five men and follow us!"

He looked toward his captain, the reckless Jacob Elfsberg, he looked at her pretty face and at his men. How the line surrounded her with their muskets, and the women armed themselves with whip-handles and pokers! At night when the light of the camp-fire tinged the heavens, the

king, inquisitive, got into his saddle. As the wild throng came back with well-laden wagons and oxen and sheep, the troops cheered louder than ever: "Hurrah for King Charles! Hurrah for Queen Caroline!"

The women thronged about the king's horse so that the lackeys had to hold them back, and Lina Andersdotter went to him to shake hands with him. But he thereupon rose in his stirrups and shouted over the women's heads to the corporal and the five soldiers: "That's well maraudered, boys!"

From that moment she would never hear the king named, and whenever she met a man, she flung her sharpest abuse right in his face, whether he was plain private or general. When Malcomb Bjorkman, the young guardsman—who, however, was already famous for his exploits and wounds—held out his hand to her, she scornfully laid in it her ragged, empty purse; and she was never angrier than when she heard General Meyerfelt whistling as he rode before his dragoons, or recognized Colonel Grothusen's yellow-brown cheeks and raven-black wig. But if a wounded wretch lay beside the road, she offered him the last drops from her tin flask and lifted him into her wagon. Frost and scratches soon calloused her cheeks. High on the baggage-wagon she sat with the butt of a whip and commanded all the wild camp-

followers, loose women, lawful wives, and thievish fellows that streamed to them from east and west. When at night the flare of a fire arose toward heaven, the soldiers knew that Queen Caroline was out on a plundering raid.

Days and years went by. Then, after the jolly winter-quarters in Saxony, when the troops were marching toward the Ukraine, the king commanded that all women should leave the army.

"Teach him to mind his own affairs!" muttered Lina Andersdotter, and she very tranquilly drove on.

But when the army came to the Beresina, there was murmuring and lamenting among the women. They gathered around Lina Andersdotter's cart and wrung their hands and lifted their babies on high.

"See what you have to answer for! The troops have already crossed the river and broken all the bridges behind them. They have left us as prey to the Cossacks."

She sat with her whip on her knee with her high boots, but on her wrist gleamed the silver chain with its turquoise. All the more violently did the terrified women sob and moan around her, and from the closed baggage-wagons, which were like boxes, crept out painted and powdered Saxon hussies. Some of them, none the less, had satin

gowns and gold necklaces. From all sides came women she had never seen before.

"Dirty wenches!" muttered she. "Now at last I have a chance to see the smuggled goods that the captains and lieutenants brought along in their wagons. What have you to do among my poor baggage-crones? But now we all come to know what a man amounts to when his haversack is getting light."

Then they caught hold of her clothes and called upon her as if she alone could seal their fate.

"Is there no one," she asked, "who knows the psalm: 'When I am borne through the Vale of Death'? Sing it, sing it!"

Some of the women struck up the psalm with choked and nearly whispering voices, but the others rushed down to the river, hunted out boats and wreckage from the bridges, and rowed themselves across. Each and every one who had a husband or a beloved in the army had hoped even at the last she would be taken along and hidden; but all the worst women of the rabble, who belonged neither to this man nor to that, stood with their rags or their tasteless, ridiculous gowns in a ring around Lina Andersdotter. Meanwhile swarms of Cossacks, who had crossed the river to snap up any straggling marauders, were sneaking up through the bushes on their hands and knees.

Then her heart failed her and she stepped down from the wagon.

"Poor children!" she said, and patted the hussies on the cheek. "Poor children, I will not desert you. But now,—devil take me!—do you pray to God that he will make your blood-red sins white, for I have nothing else to offer you than to shame the men and die a hero's death."

She opened the wagon-chest and hunted out from among her plunder some pikes and Polish sabres, which she put into the hands of the softly-singing women. Thereupon she herself grasped a musket without powder or shot and set herself among the others around the cart to wait. So they stood in the sunset light on the highest part of the shore.

Then the women on the river saw the Cossacks rush forward to the cart and cut down one after another of them with the idea that they were men in disguise. They wanted to turn their boats, and soldiers sprang down from their ranks to the water and opened fire.

"Hurrah for King Charles," they cried with a thousand intermingled voices; "and hurrah—No, it's too late. Look, look! There is Queen Caroline who in the midst of the harlots is dying a virgin with a musket in her hand!"

CAPTURED

FAR out in the wastes of Småland and Finnved wondrous prodigies appeared in the air and after that work lost all worth and the morrow all hope. People either went hungry or ate and drank with riot and revel amid half-stifled curses. At every farm sat a mother or a widow in mourning. During the day's occupation she talked of the fallen or the captives, and at night she started from her sleep and thought she was still hearing the thunder of the hideous wagons on which teamsters in black oil-cloth cloaks carried away those who had died of the plague.

In the church of Riddarsholm the body of the Princess Hedwig Sofia had lain unburied for seven years from lack of money, and now a new coffin had been laid out for the old Queen Dowager Hedwig Eleonora, Charles's mother. Several sleepy ladies-in-waiting were keeping the death-watch, and wax-lights burned mistily around the dead, who lay wrapped in a simple covering of linen.

The youngest lady-in-waiting arose yawning, went to the window, and drew back the black broad-cloth to see if dawn had not appeared.

Limping steps were heard from the ante-room, and a little man of a gnarled and rugged figure, who in every way tried to subdue the thump of his wooden leg, advanced to the coffin and with signs of deep reverence lifted aside the drapery. His fair, almost white hair lay close along his head and extended down his neck as far as his collar. From a flask he poured embalming liquid into a funnel, which was set in the royal corpse between the kirtle and the bodice. But the liquid was absorbed very slowly, and, waiting, he set down the flask on the funeral carpet and went to the lady at the window.

"Is it not seven o'clock yet, Blomberg?" she whispered.

"It has just struck six. It's an awful weather outside, and I feel in the stump of my leg that we're going to have a snow-storm. But then it's a long while since one could foretell anything good in Sweden. Trust me, not this time either will there be enough money for a decent funeral. It was only the beginning when the sainted Ekerot prophesied misery and conflagration. And perhaps the fire didn't go on over the island in front of the castle! Over the plain of Upsala it threw its light from cathedral and citadel. In Vasterås and Linköping the tempest sweeps the ashes around the blackened wastes—and now there's burning in all quarters of the kingdom. Forgive

my freedom, gracious mistress, but to tell the truth is in the long run less dangerous than to lie. That's my old maxim that saved my life once down there by the Dnieper River."

"Saved your life? You were then a surgeon in your regiment. You must sit down by me here and tell the story. The time is so long."

Blomberg spoke resignedly and a trifle like a priest, from time to time lifting his dexter and middle fingers with the other fingers closed.

Both cast a glance at the corpse, which slept in its coffin with gracefully disposed locks, and wax and rouge in the deepest of the wrinkles. Thereupon they sat themselves on a bench in the window nook outside the hanging broad-cloth, and Blomberg began whispering his narrative.

I was lying unconscious in the marshy wilderness at Poltava. I had stumped along on my wooden leg and got a blow from a horse's hoof, and when I came to, it was night. I felt a cold, strange hand fumble under my coat and pull at the buttons. An abomination before the Lord are the devices of the wicked, I thought; but gentle words are pure. Without becoming frightened, I seized the corpse-plunderer very silently by the breast, and by his stammered words of terror I perceived that he was one of the Zaporogeans who had made an alliance with the

Swedes and followed the army. As surgeon I had tended many of these men, as well as captured Poles and Muscovites, and could make myself tolerably understood in their various languages.

"Many devices are in the heart of man," said I meekly; "but the counsel of the Lord, that shall abide. No evil can befall the righteous, but the ungodly shall be filled with misfortunes."

"Forgive me, pious sir," whispered the Zaporogean. "The Swedish czar has left us poor Zaporogeans to our fate, and the Muscovite czar, whom we faithlessly deserted, is coming to maim and slay us. I only wanted to get me a Swedish coat so that in a moment of need I could give myself out as one of you. Do not be angry, godly sir!"

To see if he had any knife, I searched out flint and steel while he was speaking and made a fire with dry thistles and twigs which lay at my feet. I noted then that I had before me a little frightened old man with a sly face and two empty hands. He raised himself as vehemently as a hungry animal that has found its prey and bent in the light over a Swedish ensign who lay dead in the grass. Thinking that a dead man might willingly grant a helpless ally his coat, I did nothing to hinder the Zaporogean; but as he drew the coat from the fallen one, a letter slipped

from the pocket. I saw by the address that Falkenburg was the name of the boy who had bled to death. He lay now as fairly and peacefully stretched out as if he had slept in the meadow by the house where he was born. The letter was from his sister, and I had only time to spell out the words which from that hour became my favorite maxim: To tell the truth is in the long run less dangerous than to lie. At that moment the Zaporogean put out my light.

"With your wise consent, sir," he whispered, "do not draw the corpse-plunderers hither."

I paid little attention to his talk, but repeated time after time: "To tell the truth is in the long run less dangerous than to lie. That is a big saying my old fellow, and you shall see that I get along further with it than you do with your disguise."

"We may try it," answered the Zaporogean, "but we must promise this, that the one of us who survives the other shall offer a prayer for the other's soul."

"That is agreed," I said, and gave him my hand, for it seemed as if through misfortune I had found in this shaggy-bearded barbarian a friend and a brother.

He helped me up and at daybreak we fell into the long line of stragglers and wounded that silently tottered into Poltava to give themselves

up as prisoners. They willingly tried to conceal the Zaporogean among the rest. His big boots with their flaps reached up to his hips and his coat-tails hung down to his spurs. As soon as a Cossack looked at him, he turned to one of us and cried with raised voice the only Swedish words he had come to learn in the campaign: "I Shwede, Devil-damn!"

My Zaporogean and I with eight of my comrades were assigned quarters in the upper story of a big stone house. As we two had come up there first, we picked out for ourselves a little separate cubby-hole with a window on an alley. There was nothing else there than a little straw to lie on, but I had in my coat a tin flute, which I had from a fallen Kalmuck at Starodub, and on which I had taught myself to play a few pretty psalms. With that I shortened the time, and soon we noticed that, as often as I played, a young woman came to the window on the other side of the alley. Possibly for that reason I played more than I should have otherwise cared to and I know not rightly whether she was fairer and more seemly than all other women, or whether long sojourn among men had made my eye less accustomed, but I had great joy in beholding her. However, I never looked at her when she turned her face toward our window, because I have always been bashful before women-folk and have

never rightly understood how to conduct myself in that which pertains to them. Never, too, have I sought fellowship with men who go with their heads full of wenches and do nothing but hanker after gallant intrigues. "Let everyone keep his vessel in holiness," Paul saith, "and not in the lust of desire as do the heathen, which know not God; also let no one in this matter dishonor and wrong his brother, because the Lord is a powerful avenger in all such things."

I recognized, however, that a man should at all times bear himself courteously and fittingly, and as one arm of my coat was in tatters, I always turned that side inward when I played.

She usually sat with arms crossed above the window-sill, and her hands were round and white, though large. She had a scarlet-colored bodice with silver buttons and many chains. An old witch who often stood beneath her window with a wheel-barrow and sold bread covered with jam called her Feodosova.

When it grew dusk, she lighted a lamp, and since neither she nor we had any shutters, we could follow her with our glance when she blew on the fire, but I found it more proper that we should turn away and I therefore set myself with my Zaporogean on the straw in the corner.

Besides the prayer-book, I had a few torn-out leaves of Müller's "Sermons," and I read and

translated many passages for my Zaporogean. But when I noticed that he did not listen, I gave it over for more worldly objects and asked him of our neighbor on the other side of the alley. He said that she was not unmarried, because maidens in that country always wore a long plait tied with ribbons and a little red tuft of silk. More likely she was a widow because her hair hung loose as a token of sorrow.

When it became wholly dark and we lay down on the straw, I discovered that the Zaporogean had stolen my silver snuff-spoon, but after I had taken it back and reproached him for his fault, we slept beside each other as friends.

I was almost bashful, when it was morning again, at feeling myself happier than for a long time, but as soon as I had held prayers with the Zaporogean and had washed and arranged myself sufficiently, I went to the window and played one of my most beautiful psalms.

Feodosova was already sitting in the sunlight. To show her how different the Swedes were from her fellow-countrymen I instructed my Zaporogean to clean our room, and after a couple of hours the white-washed walls were shining white and free from cobwebs. All this helped me to drive away my thoughts, but as soon as I set myself again at rest, my torments of conscience awakened, that I could be happy in such misery.

In the hall outside, my comrades sat on floor and benches, sighing heavily and whispering about their dear ones at home. In due turn two of us every day were allowed to go out into the open air to the ramparts, but when I laid myself on my straw in the evening, I was ashamed to pray God that the lot next morning should fall upon me. I knew very well within myself that, if I longed for an hour's freedom, it was only to invent an errand to the house opposite. And yet I felt that, if the lot really fell upon me without my prayer, I should still never venture to go up there.

When I came to the window in the morning, Feodosova lay sleeping in her clothes on the floor with a cushion under her neck. It was still early and cool, and I did not have the heart to set the tin flute to my mouth. But as I stood there and waited, she may have apprehended in her sleep that I was gazing at her, for she looked up and laughed and stretched her arms out, and all that so suddenly that I did not manage to draw back unnoticed. My brow became hot, I laid aside my flute, and behaved myself in every way so clumsily and unskilfully that I never was so displeased with myself. I pulled and straightened my belt, took my flute again from the window, inspected it, and pretended I was blowing dust out of it. When finally the Russian subaltern who had

charge over us unfortunates informed my Zaporogean that he was one of the two who were to go out into the city that day, I drew the Zaporogean aside into a corner and enjoined him with many words to pick a bunch of yellow stellaria such as I had seen around the burned houses by the ramparts. At a suitable opportunity we should then give them to Feodosova I said. She appeared to be a good and worthy woman, who perchance in return might give us poor fellows some fruit or nuts, I said. The miserable bite of bread that the czar allowed us daily did not even quiet our worst hunger, I said.

He was afraid to show himself out in the sunlight, but neither did he dare to arouse mistrust by staying in, and therefore he obeyed and went.

Scarcely was he out of the door, though, when I began to regret that I had not held him back, because now in solitude my embarrassment grew much greater. I sat down on the bed in the corner, where I was invisible, and stayed there obstinately.

Still the time was long, for thoughts were many. After a while I heard the Zaporogean's voice. Without reflecting, I went to the window and saw him standing by Feodosova with a great, splendid bouquet of stellaria, which reminded one of irises. First she didn't want to take them but answered that they were impure, since they had

been given by a heathen. He pretended that he understood nothing and that he only knew a few words of her speech but with winkings and gestures and nods he made it intelligible that I had sent the flowers, and then at last she took them.

Beside myself with bashfulness, I went back into the corner, and when the Zaporogean returned, I seized him behind the shoulders, shook him, and stood him against the wall.

But scarcely had I let go my grasp when he with his thoughtless vivacity stood at the window again, made signs with his hands and threw kisses on all five of his fingers. Then I came forward, pushed him aside, and bowed. Feodosova sat picking the flowers apart, pulling off the leaves and letting them fall one by one to the ground. Vehemence helped me so that I took courage and began to speak, while I was still considering how it would be most polite to begin a conversation.

"The lady will not take amiss my comrade's pranks and unseemly gestures," I stammered.

She plucked still more eagerly at the flowers and answered after a time, "My husband, when he was alive, often used to say that from heel to head such well-made soldiers as the Swedes were not to be found. He had seen Swedish prisoners undressed and whipped by women and had seen that the women at the last were so moved because of their beauty, that they stuck the rods

under their arms and sobbed themselves, instead of those they tormented. Therefore have I become very curious these days. . . . And the love songs which you play sound so wonderful!"

Her speech pleased me not altogether, and I found it little seemly to answer in the same spirit by praising her figure and white arms. Instead I took my flute and played my favorite psalm: "E'en from the bottom of my heart I call Thee in my need."

After that we conversed of many things, and though my store of words was small, we soon understood each other so well that never did any day seem to me shorter.

At mid-day, after she had clattered about with jugs and plates and swung a palm-leaf fan over the embers in the fire-place, she lifted down from the ceiling a landing-net with which formerly her husband had caught small fish in the river. Into the net she put a pan with steaming cabbage and a wooden flask with kvass, and the net was so long that she could hand us the meal across the street. When I drank to her, she nodded and smiled and said that she did not regard it as wrong to feel pity for captured heathens. Toward evening she moved her spinning-wheel to the window, and we kept on conversing when it was dusk. I no longer felt it as a sin to be happy in the midst of the sorrow that surrounded us, be-

cause my intent was innocent and pure. Just as I had seen the stellaria shining over heaps of ashes among the burned and desolate houses by the ramparts as a song of praise to God's goodness, so seemed to me now the joy of my heart.

When it became night and I had held prayer with my Zaporogean and yet once more reproached him that he had stolen my snuff-spoon, the garrulous man began to talk to me in an undertone and say: "I see clearly, little father, that you are in love with Feodosova, and in truth she is a good and pure woman whom you may take to wife. That you never would enter upon any love-dealing of another sort I have understood from the first."

"Such stuff!" answered I, "such stuff!"

"Truth is in the long run less dangerous than lying, you used to say."

When he struck me with my own maxim-staff, I became confounded, and he proceeded.

"The czar has promised good employment and wages to everyone of you Swedes who will become his subject and be converted to the true faith."

"You are out of your wits. But if I could get off and take her home with me on horseback, I would do it."

Next morning, when I had played my psalm, I learned that today it was my turn to go out under the open heavens.

I became warm and restless. I combed and fixed myself up even more carefully than at other times, and changed to the Zaporogean's ensign coat so as not to wear my torn one. Meanwhile I deliberated with myself. Should I go up to her? What should I say then? Perhaps, though, that would be the only time in my life when I could get to speak with her, and how should I not repent thereafter even to my gray old age, if out of awkwardness I had missed that one chance! My heart beat more violently than at any affair with the enemy, when I stood with my bandages among the bullets and the fallen. I stuck the flute into my pocket and went out.

When I came down on the street she sat at the window without seeing me. I would not go to her without first asking leave, and I did not know rightly how I should conduct myself. Pondering, I took a couple of steps forward.

Then she heard me and looked out.

I lifted my hand to my hat, but with a long ringing burst of laughter she sprang up and cried, "Haha! Look, look, he has a wooden leg!"

I stood with my hand raised, and stared and stared, and I had neither thought nor feeling. It was as if my heart had swelled out and filled all my breast, so that it was near to bursting. I believe I stammered something. I only remember that I did not know whither I should turn, that I

heard her still laughing, that everything in the world was indifferent to me, that freedom would have frightened me as much as my captivity and my wretchedness, that of a sudden I had become a broken man.

I remember vaguely a long and steep lane without stone pavement, where I was accosted by other Swedish prisoners. Perhaps, even, I answered them, asked after their health, and took some puffs out of the tobacco pipes they lent me.

I believe I disturbed myself over the fact that it was so long till night, so that I had to return the same way and pass her window in brightest daylight. By every means I prolonged the time, speaking now to one man, now to another, but shortly the Russian dragoons came and ordered me to turn about to my place.

As I went up the lane, I persuaded myself that I should not betray myself, but should salute in a quite friendly manner before the window. Was it her fault that so many of the Swedish soldiers of whom she had had such fine dreams were now pitiful cripples on wooden legs?

"Hurry up there!" thundered the dragoons, and I hastened my steps so that the thumping of my wooden leg echoed between the walls of the houses.

"Dear Heavenly Father," I muttered, "faithfully have I served my earthly master. Is this

the reward Thou givest me, that Thou makest of me in my youth a defenseless captive, at whom women laugh? Yes, this is Thy recompense, and Thou wilt abase me into yet deeper humiliation, that thereby I may at length become worthy of the crown of blessedness."

When I came under the window and carried my hand to my hat, I saw that Feodosova was away. That gave me no longer any relief. I stumbled up to my prison and at every step heard the thumping of my wooden leg.

"I have talked with Feodosova," whispered the Zaporogean.

I gave him no reply. My happiness, my flower, that had grown up over the heaps of ashes, lay consumed; and if it had again shone out, I myself, in alarm, would have trampled it to death with my wooden leg. What signified to me the Zaporogean's whisperings?

"Ah!" he went on, "when you were gone, I reproached Feodosova and said to her that you were fonder of her than she realized, and that, if you were not a stranger and a heathen, you would ask her to be your wife."

In silence I clenched my hands and bit my lips together to lock up my vexation and embarrassment, and I thanked God that he abased me every moment more deeply in shame and ridicule before men.

I opened the door to the outer hall and began to talk to the other prisoners:

"As wild asses in the desert we go painfully to seek our food. On a field that we do not own we must go as husbandmen, and harvest in the vineyard of the ungodly. We lie naked the whole night from lack of garments, and are without covering against the cold. We are overwhelmed by the deluge from the mountains, and from lack of shelter we embrace the cliffs. But we beg Thee not for mitigation Almighty God. We pray only: Lead us, be nigh unto us! Behold, Thou hast turned away Thy countenance from our people and stuck thorns in our shoes, that we may become Thy servants and Thy children. In the mould of the battle-field our brothers sleep, and a fairer song of victory than that of the conquerors by the sword Thou dost offer to Thy chosen ones."

"Yea, Lord lead us, be nigh unto us!" echoed all the prisoners murmuringly.

Then out of the darkest corner rose a lonely, trembling voice, which cried: "Oh, that I were as in former months, as in the days when God protected me, when His lamp shone upon my head, when with His light I went into the darkness! As I was in my autumn days, when God's friendship was over my tent, while yet the Almighty was with me, and my children were about me! Thus my heart cries out with Job,

but I hear it no longer and I stammer forth no longer: Take away my trials! With the ear I have heard tell of Thee, O God, but now hath mine eye beheld Thee."

"Quiet, quiet!" whispered the Zaporogean, taking hold of me, and his hands were cold and trembling. "It can be no one else than the czar who is coming below in the lane."

The lane had become filled with people, with beggars and boys and old women and soldiers. In the middle of the throng the czar, tall and lean, walked very calmly, without a guard. A swarm of hopping and shrieking dwarfs were his only retinue. Now and then, turning, he embraced and kissed the smallest dwarf on the forehead in a fatherly way. Here and there he stood still before a house and was offered a glass of brandy, which he jestingly emptied at a single gulp. It could be nobody but the czar, because one saw directly that he alone ruled over both people and city. He came so close under my window that I could have touched his green cloth cap and the half-torn brass buttons on his brown coat. On the skirt he had a great silver button with an artificial stone and on his legs rough woolen stockings. His brown eyes gleamed and flashed, and the small black mustaches stood straight up from his shining lips.

When he caught sight of Feodosova, he became

as if smitten with madness. When she came down on the street and knelt with a cup, he pinched her ear, then took her under the chin and lifted up her head so that he could look her in the eyes.

"Tell me, child," he inquired, "where is there a comfortable room where I can eat? May there be one at your house?"

The czar had seldom with him on his excursions any master of ceremonies or other courtier. He took along neither bed nor bed-clothes nor cooking utensils; no, not even a cooking or eating vessel; but everything had to be provided in a turn of the hand wherever it occurred to him to take lodging. It was for this reason that there was now running and clatter at all the gates and stairs. From this direction came a man with a pan, from that another with an earthen platter, from yonder a third with a ladle and drinking utensils. Up in Feodosova's room the floor was strewn deeply with straw. The czar helped with the work like a common servant, and the chief direction was carried on by a hunchbacked dwarf, who was called the Patriarch. The dwarf every once in a while put his thumb to his nose and blew it in the air straight in front of the czar's face, or invented rascal tricks of which I cannot relate before a lady of quality.

Once when the czar turned with crossed arms to the window, he noticed me and the Zaporo-

gean, and nodded like a comrade. The Zaporogean threw himself prostrate on the floor and stammered his "I Schwede. Devil-damn!" But I pushed him aside with my foot and told him once for all to be silent and get up, because no Swede conducted himself in that fashion. To cover him as much as possible, I stepped in front of him and took my position there.

"Dat is nit übel," said the czar, but at once fell back into his mother speech and asked who I was.

"Blomberg, surgeon with the Uppland regiment," I answered.

The czar scanned me with a narrowing gaze that was so penetrating I have never seen a more all-discerning look.

"Your regiment exists no longer," he said, "and here you see Rehnskiöld's sword." He lifted the sword with its scabbard from his belt and threw it on the table so that the plates hopped. "But for certain you are a rogue, for you wear a captain's or ensign's uniform."

I answered, " 'That is a hard saying,' saith John the Evangelist. The coat I borrowed, after my own fell in rags, and if that be ill done, I will yet hope for grace, because this is my maxim: To tell the truth is in the long run less dangerous than to lie."

"Good. If that is your motto, you shall take

your servant with you and come over here so that we may prove it."

The Zaporogean trembled and tottered as he followed behind me, but as soon as we entered, the czar pointed me to a chair among the others at the table as if I had been his equal and said: "Sit, Wooden-Leg!"

He had Feodosova on his knee, without the least consideration of what could be said about it, and round them stamped and whistled the dwarfs and a crowd of Boyars who now began to collect. A dwarf who was called Judas, because he carried a likeness of that arch-villain on the chain around his neck seized a handful of shrimps from the nearest plate and threw them to the ceiling, so that they fell in a rain over dishes and people. When in that way he had made the others turn toward him, he pointed at the czar with many grimaces and called cold-bloodedly to him: "You amuse yourself, you Peter Alexievitch. Even outside of the city I have heard tell of the pretty Feodosova of Poltava, I have; but you always scrape together the best things for yourself, you little father."

"That you do," chimed in the other dwarfs in a ring around the czar. "You are an arch-thief, you Peter Alexievitch."

Sometimes the czar laughed or answered, sometimes he did not hear them, but sat serious

and meditative, and his eyes moved meanwhile like two green-glinting insects in the sunlight.

I called to mind how I had once seen the most blessed Charles the Eleventh converse with Rudbeck, and how it then came over me that Rudbeck, for all his bowings, amounted to far more than the king. Here it was the other way about. Although the czar himself went around and did the waiting and let himself be treated worse than a knave, I saw only him—and Feodosova. I read his thoughts in the smallest things. I recognized him in the forcibly curtailed caftans and shaven chins at the city gate.

There was a buzzing in my head, and I knelt humbly on the straw and stammered: "Imperial Majesty! To tell the truth is in the long run less dangerous than to lie, and the Lord said to Moses: 'Thou shalt not hold with the great ones in that which is evil.' Therefore I beseech that I may forego further eating. For behold I am soon done with the game, and my gracious lord—who is both like and unlike Your Imperial Majesty—has in the last year turned me to drinking filtered marsh water."

A twitching and trembling began in the czar's right cheek near the eye. "Yes, by Saint Andreas!" said he. "I am unlike my brother Charles, for he hates women like a woman, and wine like a woman, and offers up his people's

riches as a woman her husband's, and abuses me like a woman; but I respect him like a man. His health, Wooden Leg! Drink, drink!"

The czar sprang forward, seized me by the hair, and held the goblet to my mouth, so that the Astrakan ale foamed over my chin and collar. As we drank the prescribed health, two soldiers entered in brownish-yellow uniforms with blue collars and discharged their pistols, so that the hot room, which was already filled with tobacco clouds and onion smell, was now also enveloped in powder smoke.

The czar sat down again at the table. Even in all that noise he wanted to sit and think, but he never allowed anyone else to shirk the duty of drinking and become serious like himself. He drew Feodosova afresh to his knee. Poor, poor Feodosova! She sat there, a bit sunk together, with arms hanging and mouth impotently half-open, as if she awaited cuff and blow amid the caresses. Why had she not courage to pull the sword to her from the table, press her wrist against the edge and save her honor, before it was too late? Over and over she might have laughed at my wooden leg and my disgrace, if with my life I could have preserved her honor. Nor had I ever before been so near her and seen so clearly to what a wondrous work she had been formed in the Heavenly Creator's hands. Poor,

poor Feodosova, if you had but felt in your heart with what a pure intent a friend regarded you in your humiliation and how he prayed for your well-being!

Hour after hour the banquet continued. Those of the Boyars and dwarfs who were most completely overcome already lay relaxed in the straw and vomited or made water, but the czar himself always rose up and leaned out through the window. "Drink, Wooden Leg, drink!" he commanded, and hunted me around the room with the glass, making the Boyars hold me till I had emptied every drop. The twitching in his face became ever more uncanny, and when we were finally together at the table again, he moved three brimful earthen bowls in front of me and said: "Now, Wooden Leg, you shall propose a health to be drunk all round and teach us to understand its meaning with your maxim."

I raised myself again as well as I could.

"Your health, czar!" I shouted, "for you are assuredly born to command."

"Why," he asked, "should the soldiers present arms and salute me if any other was worthier to command? Where is there anything more pitiful than an incompetent ruler? The day I find my own son unworthy to inherit my great, beloved realm, that day shall he die. Your first truth, Wooden Leg, requires no bowl."

The pistols cracked, and all drank but the czar.

Then I gathered the fragments of my understanding as a miser his coins, for I believed that, if I could catch the czar in a gracious and mild humour, I might perhaps save my Feodosova.

"Well, then, Imperial Majesty," I continued, therefore, lifting one of the bowls on high "this is Astrakan ale, brewed of mead and brandy with pepper and tobacco. It burns much before it delights, and when it delights it puts one to sleep."

With that I threw the bowl to the ground so that it broke in a thousand pieces. Then I lifted the next bowl.

"This is Hungarian wine. 'Drink no more only water,' writes the Apostle Paul to Timothy, 'but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and because thou art so often sick.' So speaks a holy one to weakly men and stay-at-homes. But go out on the battle-field amid frost and wailing and tell me: To how many of the groaning would this bowl of sweetish wine give relief from pain and a softer death?"

Therewith I threw that bowl also to the ground so that it broke. Then I lifted the third bowl.

"This is brandy. It is despised by the fortunate and the rich, because they thirst not after refreshment as the desert for coolness, but would only gibe at the pleasure it gives. But brandy assumes power in the very moment it swims over

the tongue, like a despot in the moment he steps across a threshold, and the bleeding and dying draw comfort from a few drops."

"Right, right!" acclaimed the czar, and took the bowl and drank it, at the same time that he handed me two gold-pieces, while the pistols cracked. "You shall have a pass and a horse to go your way, and wherever you come, you shall tell about Poltava."

Then I knelt yet again in the straw and stammered: "Imperial Majesty—in my pettiness and weakness—beside you sits a—a pure and good woman."

"Haha!" screamed the dwarfs and Boyars and tottered to their feet. "Haha! haha!"

The czar got up and carried Feodosova toward me.

"I understand. He who limps on a wooden leg may fall in love, too. Good. I present her to you as she goes and stands, and you shall have a good situation with me. I have promised every Swede who enters into my service and is baptized in our faith that he shall become one of our people."

Feodosova stood like a sleep-walker and stretched her hands toward me. What did it matter that she had laughed at me. I should soon have forgotten that and she would soon not have seen my wooden leg, for I should have cared for

her and worked for her and prayed with her and made her home bright and tranquil. I should have lifted her up to my bosom as a child and asked her if an honest and faithful heart could not make another heart throb. Mayhap she already bore the answer on her tongue, for slowly she beamed up and became flushed, and her whole face became transfigured. Far away in a corner house on Priest Street in Stockholm a lonely old woman sat with her sermon-book and listened and wondered whether a letter would not be left for her through the door, whether no disabled man would step in with a greeting from the remote wilderness, whether I never should come or whether I lay already dead and buried. I had prayed for her every night. I had thought of her in the tumult in the midst of stretchers and wailing wounded. But at that moment I thought of her no longer; I saw and heard nothing else but Feodosova. And yet I was angry and strove against something heavy which weighed upon my heart and which I did not understand, but was only slowly and gradually able to make out.

I bent to Feodosova to kiss her hand, but she whispered, "The czar's hand, the czar's hand."

Then I stretched myself toward the czar and kissed his hand.

"My faith," I whispered equally softly, "and my royal lord I may not desert."

The czar's cheek still twitched, and the dwarfs in their terror pulled forth the Zaporogean from his nook to make the czar laugh at his ridiculous figure. But then the czar's arms began to move convulsively. His face grew gray and he trembled in one of his dreaded fits. He went toward the Zaporogean and struck him in the face with clenched fist so that the blood streamed from his nose and mouth, and with such a hoarse and altered voice that it could no longer be recognized he hissed: "I have seen through you, liar, from the moment you came into the room. You are a Zaporogean, a renegade, who have hidden yourself in Swedish clothes.—To the wheel with him, to the wheel!"

All, even the drunken men, began to tremble and feel toward the doors, and in his terror one of the Boyars whispered: "Bring forward the woman! Shove her forward! As soon as he gets to see pretty faces and woman's limbs, he grows quiet."

They seized her, her bodice was cut over the bosom, and, softly wailing, she was supported forward step by step to the czar.

It grew black around me, and I staggered backward out of the room. I remained standing on the street under the stars and I heard the clamor grow muffled and the dwarfs began to sing.

Then I clenched my hands and remembered a

promise on the field of battle to pray for a poor sinner's soul. But the more fervently I spoke with my God, the further went my thoughts, and my invocation became a prayer for a yet greater sinner who with his last faithful followers wandered about on the desolate steppes.

The surgeon ceased with an anxious glance toward the coffin, and the lady-in-waiting followed him forward to the catafalque.

"Amen!" said she, and the two again spread the covering over the wax-pale Queen Dowager, Charles' mother.

STORIES BY
PER HALLSTRÖM

THE FALCON

RENAUD'S eyes took the color of the day: dim, lustreless and dark at twilight; gleaming molten gold when the sunshine flitted across his hair and outstretched neck, so that they sparkled with widening and contracting flames as they looked out over the fields toward the blue haze against the slanting red of the dawn, or toward the rustling of hares in the thicket, of frightened birds and swaying branches.

Indolent and proud was his glance, the reflection of gilded steel on a sheathed dagger, of the luck-piece on the brown bosom of a gipsy girl; indolent and proud, too, the rhythmic motion of his naked feet, and the line of his arms as he laid himself down at full length in the passion of the moment with his hands under his head and heard the horns jubilating in the distance and the earth quivering with the thud of the huntsmen.

But when it grew quiet—a quiet wonderfully intense, as if spread out in a domed vault of restless waiting, with two black huddled specks that rose in circles at the top—then Renaud raised his glance, as he leaned on his elbow, his eyes wide

and lips half-parted. And when the specks came together and fell,—one subsiding in broken curves, the other dropping always above it in a line straight as a spear,—and the blue welkin rang again with voices, and the riders galloped forward to see the falcon and the heron finish their fight, the boy ran up close. He screamed with delight when the falcon, still trembling with ardor, was lifted on his master's glove, its wings drooped and its eyes blinded under the hood.

He often followed along to Sir Enguerrand's stable yard and saw the falconers bathe the yellow feet of the hunting birds in metal bowls, drying them carefully as if they were princes' children each with its crested cloth, and caressing their necks till they shut their naked eyelids and dreamed against the shoulders of the attendants.

Renaud would have given ten years of his life or one of his ten fingers to be allowed to hold them like that, the proud, silent creatures; but they might not be touched by everybody, they were noble. They had each its glove ornamented according to its rank, each its hood with embroidered pattern, each its special food, and people talked to them in a strange, archaic speech with elaborate etiquette. Renaud almost blushed when he met their great eyes filled with languid repose, especially before Sir Enguerrand's white Iceland

falcon, which had a crimson hood, a gold and crimson glove, a jess with silver bells on its foot, and a glance full of proud disdain and the yellow sunlight of heroic story.

The young birds, which still quivered with rage over their captivity and dreamed under the night of their hoods of hunting free and of lifting their necks to scream, birds that were being tamed by hunger and darkness,—them he might sometimes lift out of their cages. He might show them the light and see them first totter with blinded eyes and claws clasped about his wrist, then grow more calm, as their pupils contracted, almost gentle indeed when he gave them a bit of warm, bloody meat. But them he cared not for, them he soon wearied of, and he quickly learned to perceive that none had the Iceland falcon's breast-muscles of steel, its long wide wings and quiescent strength. But it was the most delightful thing possible to see how the young falcons were trained to hunt according to the wise rules of King Modus, when they had reached the time that their memory of freedom wore off and they sat, heavy and blind, dozing on their perches.

The first thing was to accustom them again to fly, but with a cord on the foot, till they had learned at the falconer's cry to swoop down upon the red cloth dummy fitted with a pair of large heron wings, which he swung in the air on a string

in oddly deliberate circles—that was fine to see! —and to which he had tied the breast of a quail or a piece of chicken. This the falcons afterwards devoured, the rage at their confinement being dulled by thirst of blood. Soon they grew so accustomed to this procedure that they never strained at their cord, no gleam of wildness remained in their eyes; they at once looked about calmly for the decoy and only rose according to rule, ascending in a curve at the proper time to swoop down indolently and playfully in a wide circle; and when the cord was taken off, they hardly seemed to notice.

The time had now come to train them for hunting, each for its particular quarry; the smaller for quail, partridge or sparrows, the larger for hare or heron or kites, the ignoble kites which had the nature of crows along with their powerful talons and beaks and which could never be tamed to eat at a knightly board.

First they were given decoys like their quarry, with a piece of their favorite food inside for them to search out; then disabled birds, which they could strike their claws into at once and tear to pieces in half-roused fury; and so on to prey that was harder to catch, until they learned to enjoy the intoxication of the hunt. Their old wild instincts awoke once more in full strength, but controlled and ennobled, so that they calmly

dropped their dying quarry after a short mad drink of blood and ate only from their ornamented dishes, without greediness, as is fitting for the birds of a knight.

Their eyes grew indolent and proud and took on the color of the day, black when their hood was lifted off, brightening to molten gold when they rose in the sunlight, burning with flakes of fire above the shriek of their prey. They bent caressingly toward Renaud's brown hand, but none of them was like the Iceland falcon with the weary, kinglike disdain in its glance, and he grew disgusted with them all, pressed their beaks harshly shut when they tried to play, and threw them from him carelessly, and mimicked the shriek of the kite so that they trembled with disquietude and left the aviary with men's curses behind them and the wide brown plain before them.

Sir Enguerrand rode out hunting every day, nearly always wearing his red, gold-embroidered glove, for only the bell-tinkling flight of the Iceland falcon could awaken song within him and cause him to breathe the sharp, volatile morning air with delight as if he drank living wine. One day the falcon had struck a heron, bleeding, into a swamp behind a thicket, where the huntsman found it and cracked its neck; but the falcon itself was gone, either lured after a new quarry or recoiling from the brown water or capriciously let-

ting itself be lifted and carried along by the wind. In vain they searched, in vain they called it by the prettiest names, in vain they made the notes of the horn rebound from every hill. Sir Enguerrand smote the mouth of the head falconer bloody with his red glove and rode straight home across the tussocks of the swamp with his lips shut more sharply and his eyelids sunk over the listless pupils more gloomily than ever. The falcon they did not find.

But Renaud found it, its jess caught in a wild rose bush, awaiting death by starvation with its grip fast on a branch, one wing drooping, the other lifted defiantly, its narrow head stretched threateningly forward with the eyes fixed and beak sharp—a splendid sight it was among the blood-red berries. Renaud's hand trembled with eagerness as he loosed the jess from the thorns, as the bells tinkled around his fingers and the ring with Sir Enguerrand's crest, and he cried aloud with joy when the sharp claws cut into his sinewy arm and he felt that it was his, the falcon of broadest breast and longest wings and proudest eyes of burning gold.

It was the more his in that he never would be able to show it to anyone, for he knew that strict laws protected the sport of the nobles. In the woods he would have to build a cage for it, early in the morning he would steal thither before the

bird had shaken off its chill, they would go together across the open with searching looks directed at the whitish heavens, they would grow fond of each other as they let the sunlight rise and fall over their heads and the wind carry their silent thoughts along, and the falcon would never miss its red glove or the constraint of its pearl-sewn hood. He tied it again and ran down to the pond, returning shortly with a duck which he had killed with a stone. The falcon took it, and Renaud's brain grew numb with intoxication, for that was a sign that it did not despise him, that it was willing to be his.

It became his; it bent its head forward, listening, with tranquil wide-open eyes when the frosty branches cracked under his step in the stillness of morning; it hopped lightly down from its cage and stretched out toward his hand, beating its wings as for flight, but it did not fly—that was only a reminder—and therewith they hurried out to the softly glowing expanse of the moor.

Their eyes glanced searchingly toward the dark-red welkin. Black lay the hills and thinning thickets, and the trees slept, their boughs heavy with silent birds. But the heavens grew brighter, flaming with gold and red and the lines of the plain turned to blue, and the owl sped close to the ground, seeking its covert, and the day birds stretched their wings and chirped softly because

of the cold, and dark their flight cut through the gleaming air. But Renaud and his falcon went quickly on, for these were sparrows and thrushes, no prey fit for them. Down toward the marshes sounded already the drawling cry of the herons and wide-circling beat of their long wings, yonder was the quarry they sought. Then the falcon was cast with breast already expanded and wings prepared to beat, and Renaud saw it gilded by the sun as he stood with blinded eyes and dizzy head while the bird crouched against the deep blue, and heard how the clang of its bells mocked the shout of the herons.

They whirred like wheels in their terror; now they tended to shoot down to the shore and hide their long necks and stupid frightened heads with backward-pointing tufts under the dark wooded banks, now they tried in wavering uncertainty to rise up in a spiral, thrusting in their broad wings to attain higher than the enemy could follow, and they swerved like reeds in the terror of their pale hearts.

But the falcon singled out at the start one of the strongest, one of those that flew immediately aloft, because it loved to prove its strength and to feel sharp, light air under its wings, and it rose as fast and straight as if circling around a sunbeam. Soon it was uppermost; smaller than a sparrow it looked, but something in the poise of

the wings, in the gathered strength of the body, made one divine the sparkling savagery of its eye, its outspread talons. Of a sudden it fell, heavy as steel, on the defenseless upturned neck of the quarry, and they dropped like a single stone, hardly once eddying aside by a wing's breadth. Then Renaud ran and swam and waded so as to arrive before the heron, which had been stunned by the stroke, could gather itself together and in the wildness of its desperation make use of its pointed bill. The falcon gave it the death blow sharply and swiftly, turning its great eyes, already tranquil, on its master, for it did not care to soil its feathers with blood, and waiting to have the warm heart given to it.

Afterwards it did not fly any more that day; when Renaud cast it and ran ahead with a shout, it only took a couple of wingstrokes and lighted again on the lad's shoulder close to his laughing face with proud composure. It seemed to despise all play and Renaud soon made an end, his expression taking on the far-gazing seriousness of the falcon. He grew more fond of it than he had ever been of anything; it seemed to him that it was his own soul, his longing, with its broad wings and its glance confident of victory. But there was suffering in his love, the dismal premonition of a misfortune. Sometimes he was afraid that the bird would fly away from him in a

fit of indifference; would vanish in a mocking sound of bells, and that would be his death, such an empty existence. Or it seemed to him that the falcon was honor, gleaming with sunlight against the blue, which rested itself on his shoulder for new exploits; and in the midst of his joy he was oppressed with his own insignificance, so that he hardly dared to look at it. There was grief at his heart that the bird would never share his delight, that its glance would never melt warmly into his, and he fled to the realm of dreams.

He laid himself down in the midst of the moor with the red heather under his head, and the clouds glided past like human destiny, heavy and light, gathered within a firm outline or scattered on high, with the winds' invisible hand ever at their shoulder, while the bushes bent their rustling golden branches and Renaud told stories to the falcon.

King Arthur was come again, once more from out the British sea was handed to him his sword Excalibur, blue as the chill nightly heavens; his twelve knights lifted their heavy heads from the stone table and shook off their sleep, the earth resounded with their tread. Gareth was there, the prince's son who put on the attire of a scullery boy and turned Lynette's ringing scorn into love. Renaud was there, too, was of noble birth, his horse danced beneath him, and the falcon which

now slept with sunken head sat high on his hand and sought his glance with eyes that gleamed with joy and the yellow sunlight of heroic story.

But the clouds glided past like human destiny, were driven dark, one over another into a gigantic vault, from the apertures of which fell sunbeams pale and sharp as spears, and the falcon dreamed dismal dreams of impotent wrath and waked with a shriek.

Before long some roving lads chanced to see Sir Enguerrand's falcon on Renaud's hand, and the knight's men seized him and bore him to the castle. His heart froze within him when they took away the falcon, motionless and proud as ever, without a turn of its bended neck or a look from its cold, calm eyes. They took it to its master, but he had not a single caress for the missing favorite that had let itself be touched by ignoble hands. Sir Enguerrand looked down at Renaud in silence and more and more clearly in his thoughts took form the memory of an old hunting law from the time when the nobleman's foot pressed, steel shod, on the neck of the common people, and his enjoyments fluttered unassailable around his shoulders. And Sir Enguerrand's eyebrows contracted about the certainty that the old law had never been repealed. The law commanded that he who stole a falcon with a knight's crest on its jess should pay twelve sols of silver

or six ounces of flesh from his ribs under the beak of a hungry bird of prey.

Sir Enguerrand knew of Renaud's poverty and, looking at his naked brown breast, extended his hand and touched it with an experimental, unfeeling gesture. He then sent a message to the neighboring castle which reared its pointed roof above the woods, and invited the seneschal and his two daughters to be his guests three days later and see some falcons fly, after they by their presence had heightened the solemnity of punishing a thief—and they were to come before daybreak.

Renaud's eyes had widened from the darkness of the prison; they were black and motionless, and the gleaming pupils contracted but slowly to mirror the thin-worn clouds and rising sun of the east. Behind Sir Enguerrand was borne the Iceland falcon, its talons fiercely clasped in the glove, with the hood over its wakeful and famished glances that had not seen food for three days.

But further behind curved a line of color that flamed and burned: six bright horses, almost blue in the gloaming, were led by pages at a run, with cloths of red velvet on their bending necks. Red was the wagon which they drew, and within it gold shone heavy on the tender bosoms and slender arms of the seneschal's daughters. Six damsels rode after it with hair blonde as grain, their

pointed feet playing beneath the hem of their kirtles; six huntsmen blew calls which seemed to dance and swing like wheels from the mouths of the crooked horns. The contours of the plain danced with them and shot past one another in wine-colored mist, while the clouds above had glittering borders like the wings of butterflies.

The party formed into a semi-circle, plume by plume, shoulder by shoulder, around a bush where the captive was tied. The horsecloths flapped in the wind; the red taking on depth in the shadow, heavy as hopeless yearning; the red burning in the light, gay as the clamor of victory. The maidens' delicate necks leaned forward out of the wagon, and their conical hoods flowed into one with the descending line of their shoulders. They were like herons, thought Renaud, and he almost expected to hear them add a shrill shriek, when the notes of the horns fell far away like hurled stones, and all became silent. But when he saw them more plainly with their thin, straight lips and strange, dreaming eyes, which were always leveled in a chill ecstasy on something infinitely distant, and their white, indolent hands in their laps, and the long folds of their garments—they seemed to him wondrously beautiful, like the most gorgeous saints' pictures with a dimming glow of wax tapers at their feet, and it pained him that

they should see him bound. He let his gaze leap further, past the damsels—shy, jaunty birds that he wanted to frighten with a whistle—past the red faces and inquisitively gaping mouths of the grooms, past the brown plain, where he had run himself tired and dreamed himself tired.

He knew what doom awaited him, but when the Iceland falcon was borne forward and he realized it was this which was to exact the penalty, he laughed in his joy, and his heart throbbed with pride, as when he possessed the bird and the long sunny days and the plain with the listening winds and the swaying trees of autumn yellow.

When the falcon beheld the light and turned to look around, it gathered its strength for flight, expecting to be swung on the arm of the bearer, while its glances rapidly sought its prey in the air; these glances were sharp and fierce with hunger, flaming as with sparks, and they had no memory in their depths, they recognized no one. But Renaud's eyes were fixed in anxious searching on those of the bird and were filled with tears of sorrow at not meeting them. They should have mirrored his life's bold longing, his contempt, and his dreams on the red heather, but they only waited greedily for their prey, grimly and coldly as the human spirit of curiosity or jesting on the thin lips of Sir Enguerrand. He felt his sorrow smart more bitterly than before and turned aside

his head to recover himself, his eyelids closed and his thoughts fluttering.

He lay thus while the herald proclaimed the law—"twelve sols of silver—six ounces of flesh over the heart—thus does Sir Enguerrand safeguard the pastime of the nobles." He did not look up when his skin was cut so that the scent of blood should attract the falcon, and when it sank its beak in his breast he gave no cry, merely trembled, so that the bird's eyes flamed up in rage and its wings were spread out as if to beat.

The seneschal's daughters leaned their heads forward with a gleam of interest in their strange dreaming eyes, but they did not raise their hands from their laps, and their garments lay as before in tranquil folds. The horses snorted at the smell of blood and stamped on the frosty ground so that the red horsecloths flapped against the pallor of the deepening blue, but Renaud lay silent, and the huntsmen stood needlessly with expanded cheeks and horns to their mouths ready to drown his cries.

The first agony had clutched at his finest fibres, it seemed as if his heart would come out with them; but afterwards he had grown numb almost to the degree of pleasure, and while the blood flowed warmly from the wound, and the pointed beak tore at his breast, Renaud dreamed himself into the high blue heaven of his visions, until he

understood everything, death and honor, feeling how it burned and dazzled—the yellow sunlight of heroic story.

When Sir Enguerrand thought that the legal six ounces had been paid, he gave his men a sign to blow, and the falcon was lifted off, sated with blood, its eyes filled once more with tranquil pride, and the troop set itself in motion more gaily even than before toward the sedge that gleamed yellow in the distance. But Renaud could not be wakened, he had dreamed himself to death, and they merely loosed him and let him lie with the red heather under his head.

The Iceland falcon, however, might never sit on its master's hand, for Sir Enguerrand did not care to drink of a cup where another's lips had pressed a kiss.

OUT OF THE DARK

WE had sat in the studio since just after dinner—a couple of us had not had any dinner either—and had talked, talked the whole time.

We liked to talk, we had each and every one of us convictions and opinions so firm that they impressed all the others; yes, even ourselves, as we thought them over. Some had also a share of scepticism, which at suitable moments was still more impressive; and a couple simply kept quiet, which was almost the most impressive of all. To be really deeply silent under wide puffs of cigar smoke, with a broad back against the wall, and a large indolent glance out of wide-open eyes, which during the climax of a speaker are turned away in good-natured boredom—there is surely nothing in this realm of insolvent currency that is sounder and gives one longer credit.

But now we were nearly all talking about nearly everything except politics and religion, for we had come past the years when one takes such things earnestly and had not come to the years when one takes them practically. Furthermore

we had all read at least a couple of French novels and so had got over all naïveté. But we touched on the subject of hypnotism, very carefully with a general feeling that "there was something in it." Literature we gripped by the throat and said rough things to her face, thrusting at her a word sharp as a needle, the word "style." That was what she lacked, style. It is a splendid word, this; one can hide as much or as little as one will behind it, and as an accusation it is almost instantly condemnatory. And so we talked about pictures and busts and verse, of synthesis and analysis, of symbolism and realism. We were all idealists and wrapped ourselves in the very newest imperial robes with genuine spangles of brass.

I don't know exactly what we were driving at, the utterances were so varied, but it came out clearly from the total that we had the deuce knows what resources within us and were some day going to shake new artistic tendencies out of our sleeves as easily as the trick man does rabbits. Among some of us there was a general flair for the joy of living, which was taken up most seriously and discussed—a bit tediously—as a settled duty; how one should attain to it was left to one's own free discretion and it was assumed that he who went to sleep over "Hans Alienus" had a satisfactory private reason for his conduct and might take up gymnastics instead.

But above everything we were zealous for "the new"; we held our fingers on the pulse of the time with the solemnity of one who had universal pills to sell, and were only afraid that others would get ahead of us in guessing its complaints, or that these would change, since everything progresses so fast now.

Leo had then walked about a while, taken an oblique stand where he cut diagonals across the room, and snapped his fingers at every æsthetic dogma that had ever been devised—lively, indefatigable Leo, with his sharp, somewhat affected painter's glance from behind his glasses, and his handsome, exalted countenance as of a patentee of ideas; Leo, who talked the most of all and made the greatest effect.

"Oh, the devil take it!" he had cried—his accent was half that of a Parisian and half that of a mountaineer—"I've a pain in the head. I beg leave to take the air a bit."

A moment later the door had slammed, and one might as well have tried to catch the shadow of a bird as get hold of him. Also, no one else cared to go, since it was snowing outside, and furthermore the day was so gray, so strikingly empty and melancholy; the sort of day that stares at one searchingly, haunting one like a question to which one can find no answer. But Leo went out in all weathers, distance had no meaning to

him; he walked so fast that the cold could not bite through his thin overcoat, and besides he swore himself warm at it, fighting it as if it was a personal enemy and keeping his brain ready to note every beautiful composition of lines that he passed.

We knew that in a short while he might be back with us again after he had hurried almost around the city, his headache gone and his buoyant figure full of nervous energy, with fresh air in his clothes, his glasses damp with cold, and a new theory of chiaroscuro in his head. We therefore continued meanwhile to discuss along the same line as before. The question rose of what the soul of a masterpiece consisted, to what degree it should be manifest, and what share emotion should play. We agreed that the artist's feeling should be suppressed and only reveal its immeasurable power in lines of form; otherwise it might destroy the proper effect, and a tendency toward declamation could not be tolerated under any condition. We said a number of very telling things, but nevertheless felt a bit weary, either from the yellow lamplight or because the air was a trifle close.

Thereupon we heard Leo talking outside the front door. He had someone with him, then. But whom, since we were all here? We turned inquisitively in the direction of the door. It

opened and over the threshold stepped a little, dark figure with an ugly black hat on her head, a summer hat whose brim was bent with age and cast a grotesque shadow on the wall. She was a little girl, but what sort of girl?

A strange girl, to be sure. Without hesitating a moment and before anyone said anything, she came into the middle of the room, stood still and looked about her with a reposeful movement of the head, her hands in the pockets of her cape, her whole slender figure wonderfully composed and firm, her motion somewhat like a figure in a dream, when one all the while thinks: just so, that's what she ought to do,—and yet feels with mysterious uneasiness that every gesture has meaning, every step hides the significance of coming events.

While she stood there close to the hanging lamp, which threw a sharp, dark shadow across her face, Leo explained hurriedly: "I met her by the street-car line. She was walking and staring up at the snow just as you see her with her head thrown back, walking slowly in all the cold. I saw she was pretty with a well-formed head and wanted to find out who she was. She wasn't at all afraid to come along."

"Take off your hat," he added eagerly; "I haven't had a good look at you yet."

She took off her hat, went toward the door, and

laid it with her cape on a chair, always with the same remarkable composure of movement. Then she came forward to the light again, and now we could see her face clearly.

It was pale and narrow, but not small in proportion to her figure. The chin was strong, projecting, especially as she held her head very high, and her profile ran into it prettily from the rounded cranium. The nose was straight, the lips straight and pale, the contour of the cheek uncommonly severe and beautiful, the eyebrows a little sunk towards the middle; and the eyes, partly shut against the light, looked steadily and calmly out from under short, dark lashes. Her hair, too, was dark. It was hard to tell the color of the eyes, which seemed to shift from the suggestion of gray that violets have at twilight to the glimmer of the darkest lake. Also their size must have been more variable than usual, for according to the thought that burned in them they widened with distended pupils, or closed around the steel blades of her glance;—the muscles around them were indicated under the skin with uncommon sharpness.

Her figure was slim and childish, that of a city girl of fifteen; the neck slender and supple. Every expression of the face was childish, too, but her general appearance bore the stamp of firmness,

of set character, which comes from living life all the way through.

She looked at us without letting her glance rest on anyone, looked beyond us at the studies on the wall, pausing a little longer there, till at last her gaze met the yellow dials of the clock in the church tower as it stared in through the dark atmosphere framed by the window, and her face caught at it in silent recognition. She sat down a little to one side of us with her thin wrists crossed, her eyes still, reposeful and dark.

We did not know what we should say to her, she was so strange, so different from everything else, as she sat there in her black garments. It was as if the darkness, the unknown darkness outside which hid the future, had taken form and pressed in amongst us, grave and enigmatical.

"What's your name?" someone asked.

"Cecilia."

The name acted as a stimulus to our imagination. Cecilia, the organ song that rises through the struggling light of the church vaulting, upward, ever upward, strong as if it knew its goal, pure through the clarity of space, freezing under the chill of the stars. But what a strange Cecilia was this! What song did those eyes dream?

"And you go around alone on such an evening, Cecilia! Were you going anywhere?"

"No, nowhere. I like to feel the snow falling on me."

"Were you born here, Cecilia?"

"No, I was born out there—we lived there then." She stared into the distance, with raised eyebrows, and her tone gave us the impression that "out there" was some great, dark teeming city on the other side of the ocean, that it was deep with black memories, painfully intriguing to the thought. "But I've been here a long while," she concluded.

She was so pretty with her reticent, dark manner; and her brief answers waked a trembling echo within one, like the commonplace but meaningful words in a dream. One could have sat there a long while asking questions at random and could have listened long.

But Leo grew impatient. He burned with zeal to get at his drawing, for that was why he had taken up with the girl, and he was not to be put off. He trusted in his art, did Leo; he was wont to talk of distilling the quintessence out of a physiognomy—and now he wished to do it with this subject. Just a few strokes and he would have it all in a concentrated effect: the tranquillity of chin and eyebrows, the falling line of the neck—the girl's whole content should be noted there; but if so there must be no distraction, no

emotions and associated thoughts to make one's glance stray.

"Let her alone with your prattle," he said; "she's prettier when she is quiet." And his eyes glanced with restless penetration, as if he was afraid of losing something, while he and the others chose their places.

She sat motionless; the whole proceeding appeared to be entirely indifferent to her and she continued to hold her wrists crossed and to gaze in front of her without seeing.

But we who did not draw felt that the silence was oppressive. Was not this unfair to her, was it not wrong to keep her there as a mere thing to be measured? Was not every glint of her eye, every ring in her voice worth more than all these lines? Was it not presumptuous to attempt to translate the changing deeps of life into the language of the deaf and dumb? What did she hide in the vault of her brain?—what was this girl that sat there?

The sketchers sweated and screwed up their eyes to make them sharp. They held up their hands against the light—they seemed to have a harder task than they had realized—and the girl slowly drooped her eyelashes.

With that we broke in, "You're tired perhaps, Cecilia? It's getting on toward bedtime."

"I never sleep at night," she answered, "I haven't done it as long as I can remember."

"But what do you do then? Are you up and about?"

"I think," she said, and her eyes grew deep, as if night were there before her—"I lie and think and gaze out into the dark. It's so silent then; sometimes I think that everybody is dead, and I, too. It *is* so calm, the dark is so weightless and soft and pure."

Her face had grown rigidly earnest; now it suddenly glowed with nervous life, as if a thought had burst into flames within it.

"But sometimes I can hear. There is someone walking in the street, far away; the stones ring under his feet, and he is coming nearer. First I think that there is only one, and I wonder who it can be. I dream that it's for me that he is coming, but I don't get up; I want him to lift me from just where I am, and take me to him without saying a word, and carry me far away. Then my heart begins to throb, and there's a ringing in my ears, and I hear many steps, a whole flood of trampling and dancing which fills the street so completely that I think the house will fall over and be swept away, as when the river breaks up the dirty ice.

"And I'm so glad that I burst out laughing and stuff the blanket into my mouth so as not to be

heard. Sometimes I hear myself sing, hear it actually, and lie and stretch out my arms; and the dark is no longer still, or black, it is like red whirlpools only. And I lie and wait, and know that it's for me they are coming, and that they'll lift me on high and rush forward. And I know how the sky will look: black, with great white lights. And the air will be cold and clear; it will all be as if it were at the bottom of the sea. Everything we pass falls to pieces behind us; there's a sound of broken iron and a roaring and groaning of the earth, but we hasten forward, only forward; we do not turn our heads, we say nothing to each other, only scream with joy, as when it thunders."

Her voice had a shrill and brittle ring, jubilant, but nearer to weeping than laughter. All at once she changed her tone.

"That's the sort of thing I think at night," she said wearily.

"But when do you sleep? You must surely sleep."

She gave a clear, childish laugh.

"All day if I like. Mamma pulls up the curtains of course, but I can keep on lying. Then I can sleep, especially if there's sunshine. One can dream so finely in the sunshine; one can laugh and run, and then it gets so warm, and when one gets up one is so deliciously tired!"

"But after that? Don't you go to school, don't you have any work?"

"Papa wants"—she uttered the first word with a peculiar intonation. "Papa (I don't know whether he is my father," she added indifferently) "wants me to go away; no matter where, he says. I went to school, but they didn't suit me there. Now I'm left in peace. Mamma talks to them when they come after me; she has such a proud way with her, mamma has."

"And what do your parents do?"

She looked up with a scornful dismissal of the subject and made no reply. Suddenly she laughed under her breath.

"Such a funny word!" she said. "It's out of the catechism, isn't it?"

"What word?"

"Parents. Oh, I know it means father and mother," she drawled the words out to a comic length. "Mother is slender," she continued, "but she's beginning to get fat and lace herself. You ought to see her when she's drunk soda water, oh, you just ought to see her! Her teeth aren't as pretty any more either; she envies me mine."

"And what does she want you to be?"

"It's all the same"—her voice was cuttingly hard—"it's all the same, whatever she wants; it's all the same, what she says. I shan't do it anyhow."

It was easy to imagine her home after that; what was worse, it was easy, too, to imagine her future.

She seemed to have tired of being examined now, and turned around to one of the sketchers.

"Why do you paint girls?" she inquired of the corpulent Hans.

"Hm! Because they're pretty."

"Why don't you paint war, or red clouds like those there?" She pointed to a landscape opposite her.

"Because I've never seen a war."

"But red clouds you've seen surely. I've seen much handsomer ones than those; they don't really burn."

It was an impressionistic canvas; darkness creeping along the ground, darkness leaping up to meet one from the fields, and in the midst of the fading red off in the distance a lonely shivering poplar, the one thing that rose above the plain, cutting like a sword against the sky proudly and tragically. As the girl looked at it her pupils widened, contracted and widened and trembled; she had understood it at once, and her face became fixed by the sorrow of the picture.

"That's beautiful," she said. "Is it hard to learn to paint?"

"That depends. Can you draw?"

"I can't do anything but play the piano.

Mamma taught me that, but I can play better than she does, though we have no piano now."

"Do you sing, then?"

"No, I *can't* sing"—her voice sounded more mournful than at any time before, almost despairing—"I can't sing at all now."

"Probably your voice is changing; you'll have plenty of voice if you've had it before."

"Oh, yes," she replied impatiently; "it isn't the voice I'm thinking of, but I can never sing any more."

She raised her head slowly and regarded us all with a swift, deep, strangely searching look.

"What do you do that for?" we asked. "What are you looking for?"

"I'm looking at your eyes." Her voice was childish, naïvely frank and so earnest!

"Do you often do so?"

"Yes, among strangers; then I don't look at them any more."

"And how have you found our eyes?"

"About like other peoples'. There is none of you who can *see.*"

"How do you mean?"

"I can't say any more, but there is no one that sees, really sees straight through you."

"Hm! Maybe not. Have you met any such person?"

"No, never, but I keep on searching."

"And if you should see such a person, what would you do?"

"Just wait, wait for the tide."

"The tide you listen for at night?"

"Yes, for then it will come soon."

"Finish me now," she urged with a look at the sketchers. "Get done with your drawings." And she sat as before.

But no one could draw in his usual style, no one was satisfied with his beginning. All were seeking for something, expressions changed, flaming with eagerness or drooping with fatigue. It seemed as if their thoughts tried to catch something fluttering, shifting, something that continually fled them.

Under these looks that were concentrated on her, together with the sharp yellow light, she grew dazzled, hypnotized, her mouth became tired, her eyes closed experimentally a couple of times, and then the lashes remained lowered and she went suddenly to sleep like a child, sinking back on the arm of the chair.

All had ceased drawing and had leaned forward with the same thought. What was she, this remarkable girl? Could all this be true?

Here she had come out of the dark, had come silently as the dark itself, enigmatical, disturbing as a dream, impossible to comprehend, impossible to lay hold of. Was she not just a vision,—not

sprung from us, oh, no, but a vision of the slumbering darkness, the uncertain possibility, the great new chance that might come? But her breathing was audible, light and easy; her lean hands had the marks of the sempstress, her clothes were threadbare—an actual girl to be sure, with blood such as ours, a developing soul! What would ever become of her, what would become of her?

As if the question had been put in an audible voice, Jacques took it up, the silent Jacques who was wont to make an epigram out of every conviction and who filed every doubt to the point of a needle. But he now got up to speak, advancing toward the girl with his angular motions like those of a clasp-knife and his pointed head leaning forward.

"What will become of her? What will become of her?" he said; "that's easy to guess."

He bent down toward her, but so as not to overshadow her; his hand followed his words, but with light, caressing movements, as if he were touching an invalid. But on the floor his long shadow stood bowed against hers, and his gestures became pointed, sharp as thrusts, merciless, threatening to the slumberer in black.

"What will become of her—you who can wish but not will, you who wear away your time with comparing and feeling and looking, look here at what will become of her! First her mouth will

be transformed—her eyes, too, of course, but there the change won't be permanent all at once; her eyes will go back and forward a long while and kindle and be quenched, but the mouth will retain inflexibly all that is strong enough to force in a wrinkle, to bend a line. The lips will come to shut harder when they are not opened by laughter. Here everything will be constricted together: the weariness of desire, the suffocation of kisses; hate which congeals into loathing, shame that is stifled; and then certitude will encompass them, the certitude that it must be so, that that is the whole.

"The cheek"—he almost touched it as it shone soft and pale in the light—"the cheek gets more sharply modeled, more set in contour, sinks in a little here, as when a flower petal withers. The forehead,—it will stay the same, only a line straight across as if an invisible knife had cut into the brain and divided the thoughts; barred in some to pine away up here, and driven the others to wrestle in nakedness and confinement. The hair,—it will grow darker with age and disfiguring attention, it will droop here and lie like a weight. The eyebrows,—you see there is a bend between them, they sink here, which gives a suggestion of nervous sensibility, of vibrating thoughts; but this will become no longer noticeable when she opens her eyes, nothing will be

noticeable then but their depth of weariness, their infinity of freezing chill.

"Imagine the color of the whole harder, more vivid; weigh down all that is heavy, make sharp all that is light and delicate, harden all that is strong, banish joy with a cuff and blushes with a sneer, and there you have her, that is what will become of her. Pretty, eh! prettier than now because she'll be even more effective to draw, eh?"

He stood silent a while and looked at her, his shadow trembling. Then he went on:

"That's what she'll come to be, and that, too, is all that such as we have the right to think of. But what she *might* be, ah! what she might be. If someone could take her as she lies there and dreams, take her and carry her far away and lift her on high in his arms. We keep on talking about art here, about what we intend and what the time is dreaming of. If there is anyone that has the same dreams that she has and the strength to will them, if there is anyone who's a man, she is his. And what might not become of them both!"

He looked about him at us others who sat bending forward, gazing with hypnotized looks at the white gleaming countenance of the girl. At his last words we started half up; it was as if we waited that some one should come, that some one should grip us by the hair and hurl us forward,

should lift us to where space was bright around us. Something should come to birth in us, sharp as a steel blade, unbending, unsullied, the blue sword of our will and life should be created among us, true life with warm soil and the sun that impels to growth. In the heat of the room we felt it already glowing in us by anticipation, cheeks and foreheads were red, a warm current of blood set in, there were white sparks in the eyes, and a shiver trembled along the spine.

Thereupon the girl awoke, as if roused by the clamor of all these thoughts as they beat their wings and struck together. First her eyes stared in fright, and then she laughed.

We all sunk back again.

"I didn't know where I was," she said.

"Oh, you weren't afraid of us, were you?" inquired Jacques. "You saw that there was no one dangerous here."

"Oh, no, I surely wasn't afraid." She laughed more merrily still. "No, there's no one dangerous here. But I must have been asleep a long while. I must go now."

We all offered to go with her, but she looked straight at us.

"Why?" she asked, "is the outside door locked?"

"No, not yet. But the street, the dark, the snow!"

"Oh, only that! But I went out alone. No, no, nobody needs to go along with me. I know my way."

Nobody thought of opposing her, her voice was so remarkably firm; almost scornful, we thought.

We lighted her to the door and saw her small feet step quickly on the yellow lamplight, which grew paler along the tile floor and was broken by the light on the stairway.

When she was half out of sight we called for the last time, "You'll come again, won't you?"

She turned her head. From under the ugly old hat her eyes looked out at us, deep and sombre.

"No," she said, "I shan't come again. Why should I?"

She was gone, and we all rushed forward to the window, opened it and leaned out, stretching ourselves over the sill. She had not got down yet. Before us lay the black bulks of the houses, defiantly heavy and motionless to our gaze. Here and there was a faint yellow gleam from a street lamp; one could see some large, loose flakes glide through it. The air was gray, swarmingly alive with darkness and a little farther out across the roofs the church tower stood with its shining dials against the black horizon.

Then she came out of the house door; we could hear her steps resound up to where we were

through the chilly air. We followed the little black, indistinct figure out to the corner, where the lamplight took hold of it and threw it out into tawny, pale relief. With that she was gone, vanished into the blackness, into the snow and night and threatening uncertainty from which she had come.

We fastened the window and sat down. In order to do something we tried to discuss, as we were used to, about art and its future. We talked about symbolism and syntheticism, but it all seemed less worth while now than before, and from time to time a speaker would stop in the midst of his period in order to examine a line in the half-finished portrait of Cecilia, and then give it up in despair.

And there was no warmth in the discussion, only dry and ill-tempered sallies that cut now at one man's, now at another's hobby and caused them to bolt off into the inane, where comprehension ceases. Soon we were all silent.

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